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["YOU WILL FIND A WIFE ONE OF THESE DAYS, LORD THURSO!"] SAID MRS. CAMPBELL.

## TWO WOMEN.

### CHAPTER I.

"Yes, I should have liked to have seen poor Uncle George once again before he died. It is a source of deep regret to me that I could not do so, Mrs. Campbell, perhaps you will hardly realise how great."

"I think I can," Helen Campbell answered, softly, in her pretty sympathetic voice.

She looked at the speaker gently out of her big blue eyes, eyes that were so very soft, so very blue, so infantile as it were, eyes altogether of the sort one looks for in the face of the typical oberab; eyes belonging to a child rather than to a woman who, by common consent, was declared to be well past her first youth, although to most this was a matter of almost impossible credence, so exquisitely well preserved was Mrs. Campbell's fair loveliness.

She was leaning back in a luxurious chair, moving a fan to and fro gracefully; her warm golden hair was not disfigured by any cap, but

there was an undoubted sombre tone throughout the long, well-fitting black robe close to throat and wrist, without a relieving touch of white anywhere, that seemed to speak of the deepest mourning that can fall to the lot of woman.

"I can quite believe it, Lord Thurso," she said, gently, "for I have heard so often from dear George of the affectionate bond that existed between you. He was speaking of you only a very few days before—that awful accident that was to cost him his life."

Mrs. Campbell's lips trembled, and she bent forward to rearrange the folds of her dress. The young man opposite looked at her with pity written in every line of his handsome face; but he might have spared himself a considerable amount of troubled feeling.

Although there was such a suspicious quiver of Mrs. Campbell's lips, and a distinct tremble in her beautiful hand, there was not even a ghost of a tear or of mistiness in the very clear blue eyes, which were hidden from the gaze of the pair opposite by the graceful bend of the head.

Lord Thurso fidgeted with his stick, and

had a choky sensation in his throat. He had been very fond of his Uncle George Monroe Campbell, and when the news had reached him of the horrible carriage smash that had brought death to that uncle, the young man had immediately cabled his condolences from San Francisco (where he was lounging at the moment, having had a mania for travelling for a couple of years) to his uncle's widow, whom he had never seen, and who, indeed, had only become a member of the Campbell family during those two years of his absence abroad.

As by his uncle's death he came into most of the dead man's property, Thurso had sacrificed the rest of his journeying, for a time at least, and had set forth for England and home.

He found his family singularly cold in their bearing to the new-made widow. In his frank, warm-natured way, Lord Thurso ventured to tell his youngest and favourite sister Alice that he considered everyone was "beastly unsympathetic and horrid on this point." To which assertion Lady Alice Carne agreed warmly.

"I think so too," she said, as she sat in her brother's smoking den hours after she was supposed to be in bed, and poked herself in her blue dressing gown on the edge of the table.

Lady Alice had been known to join her brother in his task of filling the apartment with clouds of tobacco-smoke, but that had been before he went abroad, when she had been a little girl in short skirts and pig-tails.

Now she had her pig-tails woven round her shapely head, and she was out—a circumstance which gave her great importance to herself, put an end to all tomboy manoeuvres, and made her a more possible confidante to Lord Thurso's grievances than she could possibly have been before. On the subject of his mother's coldness to her brother-in-law's widow Lord Thurso was not only vexed, for he hated all narrow-mindedness, but he was also perplexed.

Lady Thurso could in fact give no very definite reasons for refusing to administer personal sympathy to the honourable Mrs. Munro Campbell, except that the latter was as yet a stranger to her, and from information received (vague but most useful sentence) Mrs. Munro Campbell was not by any means a desirable addition to any family circle, much less such an august family circle as that of which Lord Thurso was now the head.

"But what has she done? Does anyone know, Allie?" cried the young man to his sister when his mother had refused to enlighten him further, or indeed discuss the question any longer. "The mother always was a bit of a tyro, one knows, but she used to be very just, and when she can't give me anything definite against poor uncle George's widow, I don't think it is just to knock the woman down altogether, and then stamp on her—beastly unfair I call it!"

Lady Alice hugged her knees, balancing herself cleverly on the edge of the table while she did so.

"Mother does not approve of second marriages, Dick, and Mrs. Campbell has been married not only twice but three times. It sounds a lot, doesn't it. Fancy, three husbands!"

"She must be jolly good-looking, then," observed Lord Thurso, shrewdly.

"Then," his sister pursued, "you see Uncle George married her in such a hurry, I don't believe he had known her more than a month. He met her in Scotland, where he had gone north for the grouse, and before anyone knew anything about it they were married."

"Well, I don't see anything so remarkable or terrible in all that."

Lady Alice released her knees and rubbed her pretty nose.

"I think," she said, slowly, "I fancy someone said her first husband was a pork-butcher. If that was true, it doesn't sound nice, does it, Dick?"

"If it was true—"

"Anyhow, mother refused to know her from the very first, and Uncle George quarrelled with us all in consequence. I was awfully sorry, Dick, for I did love dear old Uncle George, he was such a good sort."

"He was that," Lord Thurso declared, emphatically, "and I for one don't mean to treat his widow badly. There must be a lot of good in her for such a man as Uncle George to have loved her, and he must have loved her or he would not have made her his wife."

"I think mother was afraid there might be a boy, and then you would—"

Lord Thurso threw his cigar into the empty grate and rose to his full height, leaning against the mantel-shelf with his broad well-set shoulders.

"I hate all that sort of meanness. If Uncle George had had a boy, I for one should have been jolly glad for his sake, for I know it would have pleased the dear old chap so much; and having gone so far on my road without his money I could have gone on to the end without it, too. In fact I don't half like having to eat in and take things away from this poor woman as it is."

"Shall you go and see her, Dick?" inquired Lady Alice, as the clock chiming some unearthly hour, she decided it was time to retire at last.

Lord Thurso nodded his head.

"Of course. I wrote yesterday and asked her which day she could see me, and I expect I shall hear to-morrow or next day, that is if she consents to receive me at all, which she may refuse to do after being treated so roughly by all of you lot!"

"Oh, Dick, it was not my fault," said pretty little Lady Alice, a ready tear springing to her eyes. "You know I can do nothing without mother's consent. I should have loved to have done anything for dear Uncle George, and then I wanted to see her so much. Old Major Vivian told me she is awfully beautiful and sweet, and she has two girls—and it might have been so nice for me, but—" and Lady Alice finished with a mournful shake of her head significant of a good deal.

"Poor old Allie!" her brother said. Yes, it would have been nice for Allie to have had two young girls as companions and possible friends. Her elder sisters were all married, and life under Lady Thurso's personal superintendence was not so jovial a thing as it might have been. The young man reproached himself a little as he remembered he had neglected his sister a good deal, and he determined that in the future he would try and give the girl a little more sunshine than fell to her lot at present.

Two days after this conference in his smoking-room Lord Thurso journeyed down to his late uncle's country house in one of the prettiest parts of Kent, to pay a visit of condolence and respect to that uncle's widow.

He had no sooner met Helen Campbell than he straightway lost his heart to her. She was absolutely his outward ideal of what a woman should be—he was full of admiration of her lovely skin, her extraordinary youthfulness, her grace, her elegance, her charm! Lord Thurso, in a word, completely understood his uncle's infatuation, and was warmly indignant with his mother and family for their harsh treatment of so fair and gentle a creature. He had been received so pleasantly—nothing effusive, yet nothing cold. Mrs. Campbell seemed bent on showing the young man she could maintain her dignity, at the same time allowing him to see that she was very pleased at his courtesy and attention.

They spoke mostly of the dead man, and, as we have seen, Lord Thurso was deeply touched by the most evident grief this beautiful woman was suffering in her great loss. They spoke of his travels and then they spoke of his plans.

"You will let me know the date you would like me to move from here, Lord Thurso," Mrs. Campbell said, after this, and the faintest of faint sighs escaped her, "we are at your command."

The young man coloured all over his still boyish face; he began to stammer, and he did not make a very good speech; but he gave Mrs. Campbell to understand that Sedgebrook (as the magnificent estate was called) was at her disposal, not only for a week, a month, a year, but, in fact, for always.

"I am quite sure," he said, as he gained confidence, "it would have been my uncle's greatest pleasure to have bequeathed you this place as a permanent home had he been free to do so. I hope that you—you won't be offended with me, Mrs. Campbell, if I ask you to—to regard it as such—for as long as you like—if convenient—and—" and then Lord Thurso came to a full stop.

"Offended!" Helen Campbell repeated.

She looked at the young man with her whole soul in her blue eyes, as it were; then she turned her face towards the window—to hide her emotion, as he thought—in reality to conceal the smile that curved her lips.

She had told herself before he came that it would be a very extraordinary thing if she could not mould the young man a little in the

direction of her own indomitable will; but she had not imagined the game would be so ludicrously easy to win as it now proved itself to be.

She might have spared herself any sort of thought about the matter; but naturally, after her unsympathetic experience of the Thurso family, it was not at all unlikely that she might have found the present head of it slightly difficult to manipulate.

Not that Mrs. Campbell had despaired at all of achieving her purpose, which had been, in fact, to remain on indefinitely in the beautiful old house which had been her home during her short career as George Campbell's wife.

She had learnt the lesson of "man" early in life, and there was no trick, no art in dealing with the so-called superior sex that was not known to her.

She had not the smallest gratitude towards the good-looking, generous-hearted young man who sat confused and troubled beneath the burden of his own kindness. She regarded him, in fact, with a well-developed species of contempt.

"A second case of George over again," she said to herself, as she sat moving her fan to and fro, and her eyes turned towards the summer-baked gardens. "Good heavens! what an irony of fate that men born to such positions, such golden chances, should be such fools! If I had been born to such a life, such a future!"

She pressed her lips together tightly, then shook off her thoughts, and began to speak her gratitude gently, almost tenderly.

"To tell you I am touched by your words, Lord Thurso, is not to convey a tithe of what is in my heart, believe me. I am grateful to you for your great kindness. I—I am a little used to harsh treatment. No, please do not think I am going to complain; I have lived long enough in the world to know that people must be misjudged now and then; and, do you know, I really think I do not mind being misjudged by the mass if once or two—" she paused, reflectively. "My dear George believed in me, that was everything to me while I had him. Now you believe in me, I think. You will be my friend?"

Lord Thurso took the slim white hand in his.

"I will be your friend all my life if you will let me," he said, simply, and he was absolutely sincere.

Thurso was by no means the weak fool the woman opposite called him in her heart. He had, as a matter of fact, a good strong will of his own, a shrewd practical character, and he was not given to much sentiment, unless a firm belief in the angelic goodness of woman, an almost quixotic sense of chivalry (by no means a *fin de siècle* quality), a simple, earnest religious faith, can be summed up as sentimentality. But the straightest man, be he ever so shrewd and worldly wise, is never a match with an unscrupulous woman; and Richard (the remainder of his seven family names are unimportant), eleventh Earl of Thurso, was certainly by no means a match with the fair woman before him, who bore his uncle's honoured name and reigned in his uncle's honoured home.

In fact very few people could have been matched successfully with Helen Campbell. She had found human nature so malleable and plastic a subject in her cool, heartless, beautiful hands, that it can scarcely be wondered at if she had one dominant feeling towards her fellow-creatures, especially of the male persuasion, and that feeling, contempt strong and undiluted. All the same, clever, extraordinarily clever as she was, Mrs. Campbell had made some mistakes in the course of an extremely chequered career, and she was making a distinct mistake now when she labelled Lord Thurso in her mind as an under and a weak fool! It was unfortunately destined in the future that this young man was to show her that this contemptuous epithet had been too hastily chosen, and that it would have been better had she tempered



her hasty judgement with that caution and common sense which usually characterized her every thought and action.

"Then it is settled. You will stay at Hedgebrook as long as you like," Thurso said lightly, eager to cut short her words of gratitude. "It is a nice old place, and much more suited to you than to me!"

"In your present condition, perhaps, but you will find a wife one of these days soon."

Mrs. Campbell shut her fan with a smile, that would have been enough to anyone who had known her well. To Lord Thurso the smile conveyed nothing but charm.

"Oh! I suppose I shall have to marry, but I am in no hurry!" he said, with a sprightliness that spoke of an absolutely whole heart.

"True—you have the world before you. Oh! you must not look at your watch; you cannot go yet. You must come into the garden; the children have gathered strawberries in your honour—they would be so disappointed. You will remain another hour; that will still get you back in town in good time for any dinner engagement." While speaking Mrs. Campbell had risen with languid grace from her chair, and had pushed open the long window, and passed out on to the verandah beyond.

As he followed her courteously and obediently, Lord Thurso gave a passing thought to "the children." There was a vagueness about the term—was he going to be introduced to a family? Alice had spoken of two girls—but then, of course, Alice had nothing to go upon save hearsay, and she might have been misinformed. He wondered also, in the same, half-dreamy way, what the life-story of this most beautiful woman had been. If a face was a true index of the mind, he determined, surely the story must have been as in the simplest, purest lines. Everything that was gentle, harmonious and graceful was personified in Mrs. Campbell. Thurso felt a vexed longing to bring his mother in sudden and unprepared contact with his uncle's widow, and then she would see for herself how very unjust her harsh silence and renunciation had been.

It never entered into his clear brain to imagine that Helen Campbell was one of those beings who somehow repel their fellow-women as surely and swiftly as they attract their fellow-men. Lady Thurso would, no doubt, have acknowledged unhesitatingly the marvellous power of Helen Campbell's beauty, though her woman's eyes would have detected the art that supported it, just as her woman's intuition would have warned her against the nature set within so fair and lovely a frame.

They walked slowly across the lawn towards where a pagoda-like tent of striped red and white canvas was set under a clump of tall trees in the centre of the lawn.

As they drew near, the sound of a voice from within this tent rose on the warm summer air. A young fresh voice; the voice of a girl, clear as a bell, yet with an underlying chord of passion of soul in it that seemed almost at variance with the youthfulness.

Mrs. Campbell's brows contracted sharply as this sound reached her. She quickened her steps a little.

"Violet—Violet, darling!" she called. The singing ceased suddenly; the loose canvas was pushed on one side, and a girl emerged from the tent. She paused a moment; there was something curious, a kind of defiant expression in her bearing, as she stood there in that moment, tall, erect, with a pair of magnificent dark eyes flashing out of a pale face. Then before Lord Thurso had time for anything beyond feeling, in a vague indescribable way, a sense of discomfort from the gaze of those same eyes, the girl turned sharply away, and walked quickly down the lawn out of sight, just as a second girl came running, apparently from the house, in answer to her mother's voice.

The frown cleared as by magic from Mrs. Campbell's brow, and her lips relaxed as she

gazed at the lovely young figure advancing with such grace and swiftness towards them.

"This is my daughter, Violet, Lord Thurso," she said, as the girl stopped beside her, panting and laughing prettily. "She is a great tomboy, I am afraid, but much may be forgiven on the score of youth; when my Violet is a little older, she will know much better than to run a hundred yards in the hot sun. Violet, this is poor Mr. Campbell's favourite nephew, Lord Thurso. I am sure you will tell him you are very glad to see him!"

## CHAPTER II.

"I AM very glad to see you, Lord Thurso," the girl said, obediently and ingenuously, and she held out a hand delicate as a snow-flake—a hand the exact counterpart of her mother's. Indeed, Mrs. Campbell had no need to declare the relationship between herself and this girl, for in every trait her daughter Violet absolutely resembled her.

If Lord Thurso had been amazed by Mrs. Campbell's well-preserved beauty; he was even more astonished by the embodiment of blondest girlish loveliness that stood smiling up at him now like some little child; yet he was distinctly conscious this blue-eyed Violet was not a child really. She was very young—y younger, he quickly determined, in nature than in years; but the graceful rounded figure, the poise of the pretty head with its sunny crop of short curls, the laughing lips and lovely throat, belonged to maidenhood, not to childhood; in another few months the stream would be crossed and she would be a woman—the loveliest, sweetest, fairest woman, Thurso said, swiftly, to himself, he had ever seen or could have ever imagined.

He stammered some confused answer; the glamour that hung about this pink-robed dancing maiden was something he had never experienced before—it bewitched him out of his usual self.

"You promised to gather us some strawberries," the mother said, carelessly. There was a flush on her cheek and a glow in her eyes as she noticed the effect her child was producing.

"It was too hot, mamma, and I am so lazy. I told Carter to get some. Are you ever lazy, Lord Thurso? Oh, if you only knew the terrible soddings I am always getting for being idle!"

"Violet," laughed her mother, in remembrance.

"Well, you know you can be very very cross sometimes, mother darling."

Mrs. Campbell looked at the young man with a smile.

"You are hearing my true character," she said, as she drew back the canvas door of the tent and invited him to enter.

Thurso smiled back at her, but his eyes were on the girl's figure flitting about in the cool shadows of the trees like some beautiful sprite.

"Don't let us sit in the tent, mother. It is so much nicer out here, and Hester has left all her books there—where has she gone? Have you seen Hester, mother? Are you not going to introduce Hester to Lord Thurso, mother? He must know Hester, she is so clever and knows about everything."

"You have another daughter?" the young man asked as he brought the others out of the tent. As he spoke, across his memory came the vision of those two big dark scornful eyes; but surely they could have belonged to no child of Mrs. Campbell's, they could claim no kinship with this fair cherub like Violet.

"A step-daughter," Mrs. Campbell answered, and a close observer would have noticed that her lips had a tight hard expression, and that her voice was suddenly colder, "the child of my second husband—Captain Trefusis he was a widower with a little girl when I married him," then she smiled her radiant smile again, "Violet is

my only child," she said, and the tone conveyed a wealth of love.

"I suppose that was Miss Trefusis I saw just now?" Lord Thurso observed, as he handed his hostess some strawberries.

He was conscious of a slightly uncomfortable feeling. He did not imbibed his mother's views altogether, yet there was something incongruous to him, the association of three marriages with this beautiful woman, and her calm allusion to the fact; and then the remembrance of his sister's remark about a pork butcher flashed across his mind. Most certainly his uncle's widow was an interesting study in many ways.

"Yes, that was Hester," Mrs. Campbell said, languidly, but her languor was only assumed. If there existed one living being whom Helen Campbell hated, and yet feared, that being was the girl who had the misfortune to call her stepmother. "Yes, that was Hester. I must ask you to forget her abrupt manner, Lord Thurso. She does not mean to be rude, I am sure, but Hester is so very odd—her shyness amounts almost to a disorder. I assure you I am very troubled about it sometimes; but then I console myself with the remembrance that she is very young and will probably grow out of it in time."

"Oh! and then Hester is so clever, mamma!" Violet cried, artlessly. "She knows Greek and Latin and all sorts of horrid things, Lord Thurso. Just look at her books. She never takes a holiday, never. It makes me quite tired to see her working—working—working all the time."

"You are a little duncie, Violet!" her mother said, the serenity coming back to her face again as she noticed that Thurso was paying no attention to the remarks about the absent Hester, and that his every look was enchaind by Violet's graceful movements.

Violet shrugged her shoulders and shook her golden curls.

"I don't care if I am, mamma. I was not born to be clever. All I want to do is to dance and be happy. It is so hard not to dance when the sun shines. Don't you find it so, Lord Thurso?"

"I think I should if I were you," the young man answered, smiling at her childlike naivete, yet his pulses thrilling at her loveliness.

Already he felt as though he had known these fair beautiful creatures all his life. There was nothing shy or awkward about Violet. She had all the pretty assurance of innocence; she enchanted him, she was like some being from another world.

A more discriminating person might have been fatigued by the girl's ceaseless chatter and restlessness, but Thurso found a fresh fascination every moment, and by the end of half-an-hour he had fallen absolutely and wholly in mad, unreasoning love for the girl who had nothing but her blonde beauty to recommend her, and a host of worldly disadvantages to counterbalance her great personal charms. He had never been in love before, and his surrender was all the more complete now.

He rose to take his departure with reluctance, and Mrs. Campbell could hardly refrain from laughing outright at the eagerness with which he accepted an invitation to come again to Hedgebrook and pay them another visit.

"We have some formalities to go through together, you and I. I have to hand over papers and keys which no longer belong to me," she said, as the young man made his adieu. "I suppose we cannot persuade you to come and stay over next Sunday? I expect you have so many engagements and—"

"I shall be delighted!" Thurso said, and his heart beat high with pleasure as he spoke. On Saturday he would see her again, and today was only Tuesday. He had never before counted time before; it suddenly seemed an eternity until next Saturday.

"I—I am afraid you will see a great deal of me. I am very fond of the country," he said, colouring shyly, and then he held that small thin hand in his once more, and took a fare-

well glance at the limpid blue eyes and flawless rose-tinted face; and then he walked across the lawn with Mrs. Campbell, to where, beyond the house, a smart carriage was waiting to take him back to the station.

Violet threw herself into a big chair and sat quietly watching the stalwart young soldier vanish out of sight. The extremely babyish look had gone all at once from her eyes and mouth. There was a calculating expression on her face that accentuated the likeness to her mother, hardening and ageing her in an extraordinary way.

"The game is too easy," she said to herself coolly, contemptuously. "I have won before we have even begun. I thought he would be a fool, but not such a fool as this. What fools men are, to be sure—at least some of them!" Her small hands were playing idly with her lace-edged handkerchief. They clenched themselves all at once on the dainty thing.

"Some of them," she repeated to herself, "not all—not all!" The tight hard line about her lips deepened; there was a look of fear and of something else in the blue eyes that had looked up so innocently a moment before into Thurso's handsome honest face, to the swift destruction of his honest heart. The girl sat leaning her lovely head back against the cushions of the chair. "Mamma should be quite happy now, everything shapes more than successfully. She is a clever woman, she foresaw how things would work. I was not so sanguine; it is always a chance. He would admire me, no doubt, but that he would lose his head straightaway! I gave him credit for a little more character." A shrug of the graceful shoulders finished the sentence. The girl rested, thinking nothing definite for a moment, and then her lips curled into a smile that was half a sneer.

"Here comes mamma walking on air; there is not a cloud in her sky at this moment, even Hester cannot upset her delight. How she hates Hester, and I hate her too, with her great scornful eyes and her cold pride; I hate her, and yet—"

Violet stifled something like a sigh between her teeth. "And yet—what—what would I not give to change places with Hester; to be as she is, without a shadow on her, without—"

Violet broke off in her thoughts, suddenly; she sprang to her feet and ran swiftly towards her mother.

"Did I do well? did I look nice, mummy, darling? Do you think he liked me, really and truly liked me?" she cried, in her former artless way.

Mrs. Campbell threw her arm about the loyal young form.

"Who could help liking my baby Violet?" she said, and the whole burden and passion of her love for the girl sounded true and deep in her voice.

"My beautiful little one," she continued, "you are more than successful. I—I think I shall be asked to give up my baby one day very soon."

"No—mother—really!" Violet was dancing like a child with glee. "You think he will want to marry me, mother? honestly you think so? Fancy, if I should be a countess!—oh! mother!"

"I think—nay, I do not think—I am sure all my dreams, my hopes, my longings about your future will be realised, my darling. Thurso is already infatuated. I know men, and I can read him. He is not a man to lose his heart lightly. He will love you; he will ask you to be his wife, my Violet; and then—then you will have the world at your feet, everything will be yours. You will cease to be a baby, and learn to be a woman grown up and grand!"

"Oh! mother, I can't, I shan't, I don't want the world; I will be a baby all my life. Let me be a baby always, mother, always, whether Lord Thurso marries me or not."

The girl clung to her mother's arm and laid her face down upon it; and the mother said no-

thing, only drew her closer to her, and laid her lips tenderly on the golden curls. The one, the only good pure spot in the woman's nature lived in her love for her child. Through all her strange career, dark and miserable as it had been in its time, this love had never been tarnished, never touched. Her child's beauty and purity was her religion; his very selfishness, which was infinite, gave way before her love for Violet. For Violet she had plotted, planned, schemed, lied; to give her lovely child the high place in the world she had been denied herself was her life's study and task. There was nothing she would not have done for Violet—Violet, who was as white as she was black; Violet, who was so young, so fair, so pure, so innocent; Violet, who had nothing but a record of stainless purity and honour to look back upon; Violet, who was in her mother's eyes and heart not human like the rest of the world, but exquisite, divine, a very angel!

How little she knew, she who could read human nature like a book, she whose shrewd hard clear common sense was rarely at fault; she who had studied men and woman all her life, studied them only to use them for her own end. She worshipped her child blindly, absolutely, never doubting, never seeing, never imagining the truth—a truth which would have been almost death to the woman had it been revealed to her: the truth that the god she worshipped was as false as herself, that the beauty she purity the innocence that were so dear to her had no existence; that her Violet, her baby, her idol, was the antithesis of what she believed, a nature no better than her own, a sham, a spurious jewel that had no value whatsoever.

Such was the truth, but she knew it not. As she had deceived others all her life, so in her turn she was deceived by the one, the only creature in the world who could touch her heart or remind her that she possessed a soul.

Thurso drove away from the big, grey stone house in a state of excitement and bewilderment, and delight such as he had never experienced before in all his life.

This same life had indeed, despite his travels, been singularly devoid of adventure or of excitement of any sort; and he himself had been strangely indifferent, almost callous, to the power of woman's beauty.

He had always worshipped woman, as we have said, in the abstract, as being synonymous with all that was gentle, good, charitable, pure; but no one specimen of the sex had possessed any individual charm for him, although he himself had worked a good deal of unconscious mischief in the hearts of maidens, and, indeed, matrons, who had come across his path.

His boyhood had been spent always with men; his home had never been associated with much youth. He loved his mother, though they were not quite sympathetic, and he was devoted to Alice, who in turn adored him; but never, until on this sunny June afternoon, did Lord Thurso realise how beautiful a thing life might be under certain circumstances—when those circumstances took the delicate, divinely lovely form of the girl he had just left.

He could not have qualified his exact feelings towards this sunny, laughing, beautiful creature; she had touched him in more than one sense.

Her extreme youth, her pretty innocence appealed to him as little children always had a knack of doing. His own strong, well-built self seemed so giant-like beside this swaying, dancing flower of humanity.

He was conscious of a great longing to mount guard over her, to protect her, to let her cling to his strong arms, and look to him for comfort and guidance.

Her loveliness was a revelation to him; he had seen many pretty faces, many beautiful women, but never had he seen anything so wondrously fair, almost supernaturally delicate and lovely as that little oval face with its rose-touched skin, its laughing, red lips, its small, straight nose, and those two marvellous

blue eyes—how blue they were! the sky above was not deeper or more intense in colour.

Over and over again, one by one, the young man recalled the separate beauties of the girl's face as he sat back in the phaeton beside the trim groom, and fell into a sort of day dream.

They were passing through an avenue of tall, magnificent trees, through whose branches the hot sun could only find a vent here and there. It was deliciously cool; the horses' hoofs made a pleasant, not inharmonious accompaniment to Thurso's thoughts. All at once he awoke with a start; the groom was touching his hat and speaking respectfully.

"Beg pardon, my lord, but Miss Trefusis 'ave beckoned me to stop; I think she wishes to speak to your lordship."

Thurso looked round hurriedly, they were in a narrow part of the avenue; to the left there stretched a sort of woody enclosure thick and close with shrubs and low-growing plants. At the edge of this, standing in an erect, proud fashion—a fashion that had a touch of queenliness in it, was the girl he had seen for one moment in the doorway of the canvas tent.

She had no hat on her dark-haired head, the sun slanting down upon her discovered threads of warm red gold in the thickly coiled dark masses.

She was plainly, unbecomingly dressed in a grey linen gown, which had a limp crumpled air. Her skin was pale to sallowness. Had his attention not been called to her in passing her, Thurso would have taken her to be some daughter of the people. It was not until he had descended from the phaeton and stood beside her that the dignity of her almost regal bearing made itself felt.

She spoke coldly, quietly.

"I trust you will forgive me for inconveniencing you, Lord Thurso; but I have a commission to execute, and I wished to execute it before you left Sedgebrooke to-day, this must be my excuse for interrupting you now."

"Pray do not mention it," Thurso said, quickly.

He was extremely surprised, as may be supposed, and he could not help wondering why Mrs. Campbell's step-daughter should have elected to speak to him in this strange unconventional manner, when she might have found a much easier manner of doing so during his visit.

Hester Trefusis took a letter from her pocket.

"Your sister is Lady Alice Carne, I believe?" she said, interrogatively.

"She is," Lord Thurso replied, growing more surprised.

"This letter is for her," she handed it to him. "May I ask you to be so kind as to convey it to her. Your uncle left it in my charge with instructions that I was to either give it to her myself or to hand it to the care of some one who would see it safely delivered. I have had no opportunity of doing this until to-day, when I heard of your arrival. I have hastened to fulfil your uncle's command, and I hope you will have the letter conveyed to your sister as soon as possible. Had I known how or by whom to have sent it before, she would have had it weeks ago."

"I will give it to Alice immediately on my return."

Thurso took the letter, glancing at the superscription, which was in his uncle's well-known writing. "To my dear little niece, Alice, by kind favour of Hester Trefusis," was written on the envelope.

"It is very—"

He was about to marmur some conventional words of thanks, but as soon as she heard his assurance that Lady Alice should receive the letter immediately, the girl turned sharply away.

"I thank you," she said, in the same cold, hard tone; and with a bend of her small haughty head she pushed her way into the enclosure, and was lost to his sight.



Thurso frowned. "What a disagreeable girl!" was his quick thought. Then he slipped the letter into an inner pocket, speculating in a passing thought as to its contents.

The next moment he was in the carriage again, and before the station was reached he had forgotten all about this strange short interview. The letter had gone from his mind. Nothing remained but the mass of delicious, bewildering, tantalising thoughts that were half hopes, half dreams, and that all circled about a lovely, laughing girl's face, with eyes like blue forget-me-nots, and a head with a halo of short golden curls—a girl called Violet.

(To be continued.)

## A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

### CHAPTER VI.

HALF carrying, half leading his mother, Lionel conducted her to her boudoir. He closed the door carefully behind him, then placed her in a huge arm-chair.

"I have scarcely a moment to spare," he said, quietly, taking out his watch and looking at the hour, "and I want to see you quite calm before I leave you."

"You would not think of going now?" she questioned, piteously, lifting her great, sorrowful eyes to his.

"I must. You heard what he said. Besides, there is no reason why we should go over this old subject again. There is nothing new that can be said, there is no hope that can be gained."

"But—" "Never mind the 'buts.' You are only uselessly exciting yourself. You need not be afraid of me."

"I am not afraid of you, but for you, Lionel."

He shrugged his shoulders with an affection of indifference.

"That will do no good either," he answered, nonchalantly. "You only exhaust your strength when you may have need of it."

She half arose, her face white with passion. "Why do you speak to me like that?" she cried, half wildly, though her voice scarcely rose above a whisper. "Do you think that you deceive me? The effort you are making is breaking your heart and mine. Do you believe that I cannot see how you are suffering? You are sacrificing your whole life for me. Lionel, my darling, I can be generous, too. I can't endure it. Let us go to him and tell him everything."

"No!" exclaimed her son, sternly. "There is nothing under heaven that could induce me to do that! I am too selfish, mother. It is not you who are entreating me to be silent; it is I who am commanding you. You have no right to make this horrible thing known without my consent, and I forbid it. Don't let us speak of it again. Your excitement to-night almost ruined everything. You should have trusted me more. Don't detain me now. I—"

He hesitated a moment, then knelt beside her.

"Will you kiss me?" he asked, simply. She took his face between her hands and pressed her lips upon his brow.

"Heaven bless you, my boy—my dear, noble boy!" she whispered, brokenly.

He saw readily enough that there were other questions hovering upon her tongue, but that was not the time in which to answer them. He hurried away from her, tears standing thick in his own eyes, and went to his room to dress. His valet had placed everything ready for him to put on, and it was the work of but few moments.

He paused and looked at himself in the mirror when his toilet was completed.

The reflection gave him no satisfaction. He turned from it with something very like a shudder and picked up a case of pistols that lay on a table near by. He selected one and handled it carefully, examining it intently, then replaced it with a sigh.

"It is a good thing to have a friend like you at hand," he said, in a firm, cool tone. "I am a great coward or I should have used you long ago to end all this. A bullet in my brain, with a confession of my marriage upon a little slip of paper beside me, would establish Brenda in her rights and free my mother of the hideous fate that is awaiting her. And yet I have not the courage to do it! My worthless life is causing all this misery, and yet, like a coward, I live on. Ah, well! perhaps when the worst comes, I shall gain the courage to do it. Heaven knows!"

He slipped into his overcoat, took his hat, and left the house. His coupe waited at the door, and, in a tone as quiet as any he had ever used in his life, he gave his coachman the address.

He found Cora Glynn surrounded by a merry party. He touched but the tips of her fingers, then went to a corner of the room where a girl was seated in a great chair. She was a curious combination—half child, half woman—her lovely grey eyes surrounded with great shadows that gave them the appearance of intense suffering but peculiar beauty. Her face was thin, with a singularly clear complexion, and hair of that ruddy gold that artists call red.

She put out her hand and smiled as Lionel Warrender joined her, but did not offer to rise.

"I am so glad to see you down this evening, Amy," he said to her, gently. "Are you feeling all right again?"

"Wonderfully well for me," she answered, brightly. "I knew you were coming, and that is the reason I allowed myself to be brought down."

"Why, that was kind of you." "Was it? That is the first time I have been accused of anything of that sort in a long while. I did not intend it as any kindness. I don't like people. I do like you."

"Why?" "Because you are not always preaching and moralizing as the others are," she answered, bitterly. "You don't see some divine intention of the Almighty in my horrible deformity. You are not always telling me that it is to chasten my spirit, and I hate people who do."

Lionel laughed. "I am afraid I don't see very much divinity in misfortune."

"Bah! Of course you don't. Cora tells me that there is worse in store for me if I am not more reconciled to the will of Heaven. Lionel, are you going to marry Cora?"

"Why do you ask me such a question as that? The subject has never been mentioned between us."

"But that is not an answer. You know that she will say 'Yes,' if you ask her."

"Amy!"

"Then! Don't look at me like that. It is like Cora, and I hate Cora!"

"My dear girl—"

"Don't reprove me. I do hate her, and I know her better than you do, for she is my sister. If you marry her you will regret it every day of your life."

An expression almost of relief came into the handsome blue eyes.

"Shall I?" he asked, slowly. "Ah, Amy! how little you know, after all. It is she who would regret it, child. I am afraid I am not the hero that you have been good enough to think me. I am—"

"Do you think I don't know what you are?" she asked, lifting herself a trifle and looking at him earnestly. "You are all the time trying to make us all believe that you are the happiest man in the world; but you don't fool me at all. Why, sometimes when I have been lying there in the conservatory, I

have heard the unhappiness so strong in your voice that I have almost cried out. You are trying to make believe that you are very merry to-night, but it is just a little worse than usual. Lionel, what is it?"

"Hush!" he cried out, almost as if she had hurt him. "You are very foolish to say such things. It is not true."

"Lionel!"

"Your sister is beckoning me, I must go."

He left her without another word, and did not join her again during the evening. He did not believe what she had said about Cora. He thought she loved Darcy Brooke. He felt so sure of it that it seemed to him there was not the slightest danger in his keeping his promise to his father and asking her to be his wife.

He would not look in the direction of the great, shadowed grey eyes that were fixed upon him during the dinner hour, but found an excuse to ask Cora to join him in the conservatory half-an-hour later.

She was tall, of remarkable grace and distinguished bearing; but Lionel saw little of that as he stood beside her. His manner was always gentle and caressing toward women. There was the look of the lover in his eyes even when they were bent upon his mother, and Cora was quite satisfied that he loved her only as he leaned over her, though in reality he could not have told at that moment, except from memory, if she were fair or dark.

"Cora," he said to her very gently, "I believe you know why I have asked you to come here with me. At least you must have guessed. I have known you half my life, dear. We have grown up from boy and girlhood together, and I am afraid it is more as a brother that you regard me than anything else, and yet I have brought you here with me in order that I might ask you to become—my wife. What have you to say?"

He absolutely reeled under the whispered "Yes." He could never remember how he maintained the conversation further, but he believed that the cold air that poured in from a window that he had opened when some one came to take her away had saved his consciousness.

"Good Heaven!" he muttered, raising his eyes to the starlit sky. "What a sounder I am! There is nothing for it but the revolver now. Well, I am not sorry that it is forced upon me, for force generates courage."

Then he became aware that a tiny hand was lying upon his arm. He looked down. Amy, supporting herself painfully upon two crutches, stood beside him.

"You did it, didn't you?" she said, with a bitter sneer; "and now you are sorry. I told you she would not refuse you. You are a greater fool than I took you for, Lionel. You don't deserve help, but I will help you, for all that. I shall do it because I hate her!"

"Amy, what are you saying?"

"Don't moralize now. It is not the time. I am not going to poison her, nor run a stiletto through her back. Whatever bad I do in the world, you may be sure there is no concealment about it. At least, don't use the revolver you spoke of until the night before the wedding."

### CHAPTER VII.

THE full force of the blow that had fallen upon her did not make itself felt to Brenda until after she had reached the hotel and sat alone in her cheerless room. She was stunned, mentally half paralyzed, and unable to consider the position in which she was placed. And then, as the reality of the situation came to her, a great indignation filled her heart.

Her husband, the man whom she loved above all the world, had listened without even a word of disapproval, while her honour had been assailed. He had allowed his child to be branded, and had by his silence attested

to his own dishonour. What was there under the sun of heaven to exceed the shame of that?

She had not lighted her gas, but sat there in the darkness, gazing up at the starlit sky, striving to seek some solution of the mystery that surrounded her from the unanswering heavens. Then she rose and began to pace the floor rapidly, at one time with quick, swinging strides, then with tottering steps, as if the mental anguish were too great to be borne.

"What shall I do?" she kept repeating to herself—"what shall I do? Can I submit myself to the humiliation of ever seeing his false face again? Let me not think of myself, but of my child—my son, whose good name I must save if it be possible. But he knows the child. He has branded his own flesh and blood. What is there to hope from such a man?"

She paused in her walk, and with her hand resting upon the window-sill looked out again. A dark, revengeful bitterness had gathered in the beautiful eyes, some terrible temptation seemed working in the youthful brain; but she shook herself almost angrily, apparently arousing herself from it.

"No," she cried aloud, "not that! God in heaven, if Thou hast any pity keep me from such thoughts as that—for my baby's sake!"

She stopped again for a moment, and then a stern expression crossed her countenance.

"My father!" she whispered, "my poor old father, whom I have abandoned! I know now how he has suffered. It has been two long, weary years since he looked into my eyes. Surely the time has been long enough to teach forgiveness. If he knew how bitter my punishment for disobedience has been he would not add to it, but pardon me and grant his blessing. He will forgive me. I will go to him. Upon bended knee I will plead with him; but I must not forget my oath—I must not, if I can remember."

There was great resolution in the white face as she rose and fastened her heavy cloak about her. She rang the bell and asked for her bill; then when it was paid she plucked on her hat and faced the night alone.

She knew the city and was not afraid. She took an omnibus to the city. It was dark and she was alone, but if that fact attracted attention from any one she was not aware of it.

She saw nothing but the rows of houses and shops along the well-lighted streets, and her mind was busy with the dead past when she as a light-hearted, happy, thoughtless child had travelled up and down there, little dreaming that she should ever become one of the broken creatures with which she often came in contact.

There was the shop where her father had bought their ingrain carpet for the sitting-room of which they had been so proud, and there was the place where they had purchased the chromo of Beatrice Cenci that she had admired so extravagantly in her earlier years.

She smiled through all her bitterness as these thoughts recurred to her—a weary, wan smile that would have touched a heart of granite.

They were passing up Cornhill. The bus was about to turn a corner, and she knew that she must leave it.

The smile had vanished. She signalled the conductor and staggered out.

Only a little way now to the shop with the three gilt balls over the door. How her heart beat. For the first time she wondered if her father still lived there.

She saw no one as she passed. There might have been some of her former acquaintances within a foot of her, but she looked neither to the right nor the left.

She was searching for that little gilded sign, and—there it was straight ahead.

She paused before it and glanced up. The same name was over the door—Bernstein.

How familiar it all looked after her long

and heart-breaking absence. And how would her father receive her?

A great sob rose in her throat that almost strangled her. Once the temptation came to go away and not risk it, but the next she had put it from her almost passionately.

She wanted to see his dear old face once again, and she would see it, let the result be what it might.

With an assumption of boldness she entered the side-door that she remembered was for the use of "ladies." There was no one in the back room, but a little bell upon the door gave notice that a guest waited.

Almost at the same moment the rear door opened, and a bent old man with Jewish features and hair as white as the snow outside came into the room.

She scarcely recognised him at first, so changed was he from the father that she remembered so well—and in two little years.

He did not know her. She could scarcely repress the sobs that seemed breaking through her compressed lips. His eyes had failed, and he peered at her almost as a blind man does.

"Well, madame," he said, in a tremulous voice with a strong accent, "is there anything that I can do for you to-night?"

She did not reply. She was shaking like a storm-blown leaf.

"Is it money that you want?" he asked, with a rather sympathetic smile.

She could endure it no longer. She flung her arms about his shoulders and burst into wild sobbing.

"Father," she cried, passionately, "is it possible that you have forgotten me?"

He stood for a moment as if dazed. An awful pallor had settled over his features. He tried to speak, but his lips were stiff and dumb. He, too, was trembling under the violence of his emotion, but his inert arms refused to be lifted.

"Father," she cried, wildly, "have you nothing to say to your most unhappy daughter? Have you no word of pity after our long separation?"

Those words seemed to break the spell. He stepped back, causing her arms to fall from his shoulders. He was white as death—a livid grey.

He lifted his hand and motioned her to silence.

"Wait," he said, hoarsely. "There are some questions I must ask you first. How comes it that you are here?"

"To see you, father. To beg your forgiveness for my disobedience—to beg of you to allow me to pass the remainder of my wretched days beneath your roof—to be your loving child again. Father, I am so tired!"

There was such utter weariness in the tone that no one could have doubted the truth of her statement, but old Hans Bernstein's face only hardened.

"You are tired," he repeated. "Tired of what? Tired of your life of shame? Have you come here to tell me that you are an honoured wife? Tell me that!"

"No," she answered, so low that he had to lean forward to catch the sound of her voice.

"No? Then for what? To tell me that you have heaped up the shame that you brought upon my honest name until you can put no more upon it, and that now, abandoned by the man for whom you gave your honour, you have returned to me? No, I will not accept more disgrace than you have already forced upon me! You are a shame to your race, a dishonour to your name. You are a lost—"

"Father," she interrupted, madly, "you shall not say those horrible things to me! They are false—all false—I swear it to you! My sins are those of misfortune and disobedience alone. I am not the guilty thing you think me."

"Then you are a wife?"

"Yes, before Heaven!"

She had lifted her arms upward, as if imploring the corroboration of Heaven, and

Hans Bernstein fell upon his knees before her, clasping the hem of her gown in his trembling hands. Tears were pouring over his white face.

"Prove that to me!" he cried. "Prove it to me, and I will spend the rest of my life upon my knees begging your pardon for the wrong that I have done you. Prove it to me, that I may tell all the world. I am not the dishonoured thing they have believed me. Prove it to me, and, no matter what wrong you have suffered, I will right you, if it cost the remnant of my worthless life!"

He was looking up eagerly, pleadingly, into her ghastly face, but the hope and prayerfulness had died from it, leaving it bleak and cold as death. Her eyes were dull and expressionless, and about the sweet lips had come a blue line like that which heralds dissolution.

The old man caught her closely about the knees.

"Brenda," he whispered, "why don't you speak?"

"I cannot!" she stammered.

He staggered to his feet. The pleading had vanished from his countenance. It was stern and cold and hard as iron.

"Then it was all false?" he said, slowly.

"No; before Heaven it is true. I swear it to you. I have no proof to offer—nothing but my own word; but—"

He did not wait for her to finish. His long finger was pointed towards the little door through which she had entered.

"Go!" he said, coldly.

"Father, hear me!"

She flung out her arms towards him, but he stepped back, and, with finger still outstretched, repeated the one syllable,—

"Go!"

She bowed her head meekly, after one beseeching glance, passed him, and went out into the darkness again. He listened, with sharpened senses until he heard the outer door close upon her, and then the magnitude of what he had done seemed to break in upon him.

An expression of indescribable anguish crossed his face.

She was his child, after all, and he had sent her forth alone—to what?

A cry of agony broke from his lips. He would recall her and beg her pardon, let the cost be to himself what it would. He repeated her name once, twice, wildly, then started frantically towards the door.

He flung it open, but in the little dark hall he fell face forward, unconscious.

They found him there half an hour later, but it was then too late! She had gone!

## CHAPTER VIII.

It is not the act of a lover to send a word of apology by other lips for his sudden leaving upon the first night of his betrothal, but that is just what Lionel Warrender did. He felt that he had tested his strength to the utmost limit, and that he dared not face Violet Clifton again.

He turned almost fiercely to the lame girl beside him.

"Bessie," he cried, "if you have any pity for me and really want to help me, get me out of here. I can't stand it another minute; I feel as if I were going mad. Tell her that I am ill—anything, so long as you excuse my sudden absence; but get me out of this."

"Go on! I'll tell her that you felt that you must be alone with your happiness; that you could not bear to have other eyes upon you on this the first night of your bliss."

He heard the mockery of her tone, but did not pause to find fault.

"You said you would be my friend; begin now."

"I am ready. Come this way; I will show you a private door. Never mind; I can walk. I am doing it for exercise every day. Rather



painful, isn't it? Don't let it distress your weak nerves as it does those of your future wife. Bah! Good-night, Lionel! Heaven help you, poor boy! I wish I knew what has made you do this insane thing to-night; but I am quite sure that it would be useless to ask you. Don't forget what I said about the revolver; it is always in its case when everything else fails. Good-night."

He leaned forward and kissed her upon the brow. He had secured his coat and hat in passing through the hall, and slipping into them he turned away. At the same moment the door was closed upon him, and he found himself alone under the stars.

It was bitterly cold, but the air seemed only to revive his spirits. He had not ordered his carriage for an hour later, and there was nothing for him to do but take a street car or walk. He preferred the latter, feeling unable to meet the gaze of strangers.

He was going to Brenda his wife!

He shuddered as he kept repeating that fact to himself. He was going to his wife; he, the betrothed husband of another woman.

He laughed aloud at the hideousness of the situation came to him.

"I am learning to be a scoundrel with a vengeance!" he said to himself, bitterly. "I shall be absolutely marrying her and committing bigamy the next thing I know, I suppose. Good Heaven! what have I done? I never thought there was the slightest fear of her accepting me. It is a disgrace, any way one puts it now. I, a married man, engaged to one of the greatest beauties in all England! Was there ever a situation like that before? And what am I to say to Brenda?—what am I to say to Brenda? My poor little, wronged, innocent wife! Why did not I know this horrible thing before I had brought this hideous complication into her life? It is the working of the devil straight through. I ought to end it all to-night; but somehow I seem impelled to take that child's advice and wait. For what? Something worse, perhaps! No! there can be nothing worse! This is the limit!"

His eyes were bent upon the snow-covered streets, and it was not until a man had placed a hand upon his arm that he looked up. He recoiled.

"Hallo, Brooks!" he exclaimed. "That's you?"

"Yes. Where are you going? You were walking along there like Othello—"

"Don't joke, man. I am in the most infernal position that ever a man was. Brenda's in town."

"Brenda?"

"Yes."

"How does that happen?"

"I don't know. She turned up at the house and made no end of a scene."

"And you have acknowledged—"

"Nothing. Surely you know my father too well for that!"

"But, Lionel, don't you think even disinheritance better than all this concealment? Don't you think—"

"You don't understand it! If you did, then there might be some reason in what you say. Do you think that I am afraid of work? Bah! It does well enough to tell to her, but surely you know that it is not true? But that is not the worst; I have asked Violet Clifton to-night to be my wife."

"And she—"

"Consented."

"Lionel!"

There was absolute horror in the man's voice, and Warrender shrugged his shoulders. "I tell you that I am in a hole that nothing but death can extricate me from. Don't think that I am trying to arouse your sympathy, for I am not. You cannot think me a worse scoundrel than I know myself to be."

"But I don't understand it at all."

"Neither do I. I seem to be under the influence of some horrible nightmare from which I must awaken presently. Heaven knows, I wish it could prove true!"

"Good Heaven! man, you must be mad. Do you mean that you are going to let yourself drift on to destruction like this, because you have not the courage to right yourself? Face anything rather than what you are doing! Have the courage of your manhood! Go and tell this to your father."

"No, no! Not that. I cannot; you must not, Brooks. Whatever comes, you must let me work out my own plans. You swore that you would never betray me, and your friendship has been the only sweet thing in my unhappy life. You don't understand, and I can't explain; but if you speak you not only ruin me, but you would do a frightful wrong to another that nothing could ever undo. You must not!"

"And do you consider this other person so much more than you do your wife?"

"I must. If I could only persuade Brenda to trust me for a while. If I could only induce her to keep silent and wait! There is one thing that would end it all—my death! It would establish her, and wipe out every evil. But I am a great coward, Daroy."

"I have almost come to the conclusion that you are a lunatic. What are you talking about? Where are you going?"

"To my wife. Will you come with me?"

"Yes. I want to hear the conversation with her. I have known from the beginning what was to come of this, and I warned you; but you would not listen. Hear me, Lionel. You know that I am as fond of you as if you were my brother—that I would do anything for you consistent with my honour—but I will not see you wrong her. Your wife is worthy of the love of any man, and I tell you frankly that if the test comes between you and her, my assistance goes to her. It is little enough that I can do for her, Heaven knows; for I have not a single proof of her marriage to offer; but I shall do all for her that lies in my power."

Lionel Warrender did not reply. It is doubtful if he even heard the remarks of his friend. He was thinking too deeply, too bitterly, of the awful situation to hear—wondering what he should say to that wronged wife whom he felt that he dare not face alone.

And how he loved her!

Every sentiment of his heart and soul seemed to go out to her. Once the thought occurred to him that he would take her and fly to some remote part of the country where he should never be heard from again; and then he knew that that would not avert the calamity he feared. He was suffering as men rarely ever do in this world, and what made it all the harder to bear was that the fault was little, if at all, his own. The only sin that he had committed was in the first concealment of his marriage.

The two men stalked on in silence, both busy with their thoughts; then Lionel suddenly raised his head.

"You have said nothing about Violet Clifton," he said, slowly. "You loved her, did you not?"

A anxious expression crossed the dark, handsome face.

"No," he answered, quietly. "There was a time when I thought I loved her, but I know now that I did not."

They were too near the entrance of the hotel for Warrender to reply. They entered together, and as coolly as he usually asked for a guest he asked the clerk for "Mrs. Warrender."

The man turned to the register.

"Mrs. Warrender has gone!" he answered, after an examination.

Lionel started violently.

"Gone!" he ejaculated. "Where?"

"That I can't say. She had no luggage. She paid her bill and left the house."

"In a carriage?"

"No; on foot."

Lionel Warrender turned to Brooks. His face was ghastly under the electric light, but he was striving valiantly to preserve his composure.

"There is no train to her home to-night," he said, hoarsely. "What do you think it can mean?"

"Did she know that you intended to call?"

"Yes."

"There can be but one explanation, then—she desired to avoid the interview."

"But why—why?"

"It is useless to seek the answer to your question here. We must find her, and at once."

"But where to look?"

"You forget the attraction that home holds. A woman does not desert her child. We must find her Lionel, and you must right the wrong that you have done."

"And I will, Heaven help me, let the cost be what it may!"

## CHAPTER IX.

WITH heavy, tottering steps Brenda left the house where all the young, happy years of her life had been passed. She did not realise how much she had hoped until the bang of the front door told her that it was all at an end; then her poor, heavy heart sunk like lead. She was an outcast, a disowned wife, a dishonoured mother! She realised it all fully as she stood there for a moment helpless under the terrible blow that had fallen upon her.

What should she do? Go back there to that horrible place where she had left her child, take him with her, and, going into some part of the world where she was unknown, live out the miserable remnant of the years left her?

A terrible shiver shook her from head to foot. She lifted her eyes to the stars and groaned.

"I shall die!" she murmured, hoarsely.

"I know I shall, and then what will become of my poor, helpless child? Only Heaven knows! only Heaven knows!"

She bowed her head, endeavouring to strangle the deep sobs that arose in her throat. Her eyes were dry and tearless, but her heart seemed burning under the burden that was too great to bear.

Then the lights in the streets faded. Her head reeled. She put out her hand to clutch at something to save herself from falling and caught an arm in her hand. She knew a moment later that she was leaning against a man's shoulder, but had not the strength to lift her eyes even in expression of gratitude until she heard a wild voice crying in her ears—

"Brenda! It is Brenda! For the love of Heaven, child, speak to me and tell me that I am not wrong!"

They were in the street, but neither of them seemed to consider that. She staggered back from him, but he still held her hand closely in his.

"Raymond!" she whispered, "my cousin? it is really you?"

"Yes, dear, it is I. Where are you going, Brenda? Have you forgotten the old place? This is your father's house, child. Come with me."

"No!" she cried, drawing back with a shudder; "not there! Anywhere but there! He has sent me away, Raymond, out of his life and his home for ever! I cannot go. Oh, why did you find me!—why—"

"Hush!" he said, almost sternly. "Can you stand? Can you walk? Come with me."

He drew her hand through his arm and half led, half carried her with him. He walked swiftly, seeming almost to forget her, his brows drawn firmly.

They walked several blocks in silence; then he turned into a place, poor enough as a house. He took a key from his pocket and opened the door, then half carried her up the stairs. He pushed open the door of a small, meagrely furnished sitting-room, placed her on a sofa, turned up the gas, and stood before her looking at her closely.

He was a tall man with a peculiar appearance of age in youth. His face was lined with care and heartaches with which his years could not keep pace. There was nothing unkind in his gaze as it was bent upon her, but only sorrow and despair.

"Brenda," he said, bitterly, "tell me the meaning of all this? For two long years your father has never allowed me to mention your name in his presence. For two long, cruel years no sign or token was ever received of whether you were dead or alive. I have spent every shilling that I have earned in striving to trace you, until sometimes there has scarcely been bread in the house for us to eat. I have lived only in the hope of finding you. Once or twice I thought I had succeeded, and I wrote you letters that I know would have been answered if they had ever been received, but none came, and then hope died within me. I had given up, Brenda, yet to-night you come back into my life. But how—how? I find you covered by a cloak that a princess might wear. Your fingers flash with diamonds that would ransom a king, yet you are an outcast from your father's home. Brenda, in Heaven's name, what does it mean?"

For one brief instant she started up as if to defend herself from the insults that he had offered her, then she sunk wearily back in her chair and closed her burning eyes.

He looked at her anxiously for a moment, then knelt by her side. He took her hand gently and raised it to his lips.

"Don't think that I mean to reproach you, my darling," he whispered, gently. "It is not that—it is not that! I don't know what your temptation was. I am not your judge, but I swear before Heaven that the man who has injured you shall suffer! I swear before Heaven that I will avenge every heartache that you have endured! Tell me the name of the wretch who has wronged you, and by the God of Israel, I will kill him before I sleep!"

She started up, catching the arm of the chair in her rigid hand. Her great burning eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

Did she then, after all, love Lionel Warrender so well that the mere thought of a threatening danger filled her with keenest anguish? It was but too true, and in that instant she knew it. However false he was, she knew that she would suffer anything, endure anything rather than that any harm should befall him. Her heart seemed to close with a sickening sensation as she looked into her cousin's determined face.

"What are you saying?" she demanded hoarsely.

"What I mean!" he answered, so quietly that her heart thrilled with fear. "Tell me but his name, and if he refuses to right the wrong that he has done you, then I will kill him!"

She looked at him, horrified to silence. She felt his hot breath upon her cheek, understood the dull glow in his eyes, felt the resolution within his breast through the tones of his voice.

She drew her hand from him and covered it with the other, as if her hold of herself would impart courage.

"You are wrong—all wrong," she said, heavily. "There is no one; no one at all who has wronged me!"

He arose and stood before her, looking down upon her sorrowfully.

"Will you swear that, Brenda?"

Her eyes fell.

She dared not; and he knew she would not dare unless she had spoken the truth.

He turned away with a bitter sigh.

"You need not have tried to lie to me!" he said, miserably. "You were always too truthful to ever deceive anyone. You could not do it, dear; and even if you will not tell me I shall find out for myself. Do you think I don't know? Did you think I could not read every line of your secret in your face? I could tell it all to you as well as you can tell it to me, except the name, but I shall discover that also. I shall discover sooner or later,

because, whatever comes, I shall never lose sight of you for one moment of your life. And as soon I discover I shall kill him!"

"Raymond, you are speaking wildly. For the love of Heaven, think! Even if what you say were true, and some one had wronged me, what could his death accomplish?"

"Vengeance!"

The word rang through the silent room like a bell. A horrible shiver passed over Brenda's excited figure.

"Have you forgotten the words of the Scriptures: 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay?'" she asked, almost below her breath.

He raised his eyes heavenward, his face white as death, and answered, slowly,—

"I have not forgotten the old Mosaic law, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' I cannot make of him what he has made of you. I cannot make him an outcast from his father's home, because the male leper is forgiven, while his victim is hounded from the face of the earth; but I can kill him—and I will!"

"Raymond!" she cried, falling upon her knees and seizing his ice-cold hand between hers, "for the love of Heaven recall your words! You cannot bring my lost life back to me. You cannot make of me the girl you loved in the dead long ago by staining your soul with a crime. Tell me that you did not mean it, and I will swear to you upon my honour that I will never see him from this night as long as I live."

"You love him still, then?"

"Heaven help me, yes!"

"Then you will not tell me his name? You will shield him from justice? But the Ruler above will not have it, Brenda. I shall discover."

"Raymond, listen to me!"

"I will listen to you for ever, my darling, if you choose to speak, but you cannot turn me from my purpose. Nothing under heaven could do that; I am determined! I shall seek night and day until I find him; I shall search the earth from end to end. Then, when he stands before me, I shall kill him like the reptile that he is!"

There was not a quiver of a muscle in the set, still face. There was not even a gleam of anger in it to give her hope. It was the dull determination of an unchangeable man. He loved her with a love that knows no death; but she could not move him, and she knew it.

He saw that she was tired, after a time, and, with a gentle tenderness that touched her strangely, he left her there to sleep.

"You will find a bed there, in the next room," he said to her, as he kissed her good-night. "I shall tell mother that you are here; but she will not come to you until morning, as I know you would wish. Don't be afraid. From this time on, for ever, there will be a watch-dog at your elbow that will protect you from every harm. Good night, Brenda!"

Then, when he had gone, she flung herself down beside the little window and looked up at the cold, silent sky.

"Ah, Heaven!" she moaned, "what am I to do? This is more than I can bear! He will kill him—kill Lionel. And, after all, he is my husband—my husband, and—and I love him! Father help me to save him—help me to conceal his identity."

She bowed her head upon the window-sill, and remained there some moments; then some horrible thought came to her, and she sprang up with a barely repressed scream.

"My child!" she gasped. "My baby! I dare not go to him! I dare not claim him! It would mean his father's death. I dare not—dare not! Oh, Heaven! what have I done that I should be cursed like this?"

## CHAPTER X.

DURING all the hours of that long, cruel, night Brenda never once arose from her crouching position before the window. She did not weep; her grief and terror were too

great for tears. She sat there staring with great, shining eyes straight into the dark, silent heavens, striving to think, and struggling against the horrible numbing agony that was upon her.

Death!—that was what she wanted, what she prayed for. She saw clearly that to save his father's life she must abandon the child whom she worshipped, and death was preferable to that.

Then as the cold gray of morning broke, she bowed her haggard face upon her knees. Some degree of consolation—if consolation the gruesome feeling might be called—came to her.

"If I were dead," she whispered, "Lionel would be sorry for the terrible wrong that he has done; he would acknowledge my baby; I would be out of his way; the child would be better off than starving with an abandoned mother, and Lionel would be free. I am only in the way; I am not needed by any one on earth! My father would forgive me when he knew the truth. Oh, it is better so—much better so—much better! Heaven will know the temptation and forgive me. I will ask Lionel to tell my father the truth, to clear me of the sin of which he has accused me, and he will surely not refuse his dead wife a favour that he would not grant to the living one—and so small a one!"

Still not a tear dimmed the awful brightness of her eyes. She arose from her position upon the floor and straightened out her aching limbs. The first red rays of the rising sun stole through the window, falling caressingly upon her dark, graceful head. She glanced about her, not the slightest wavering in her expression. In a corner of the room was a little shabby writing-table, and without even a sigh she sat down to it.

Her hand trembled slightly, but not with irresolution, as she dipped the pen into the ink. The deepest grief in her sore heart was the thought of never seeing her child again; yet she wrote firmly,—

"MY DEAR AGNES,—

"The very worst has happened. I promised to consult you before acting under any impulse, but there are reasons why I cannot keep my word. I am in as bitter trouble as any that has ever darkened a life. I am suffering for the sin of disobedience. I am only in the way, Agnes, and Heaven will forgive me that I cannot bear it longer. It is not that I have lost my courage, but it is much better for all concerned in this awful affair that I should die. You have been my single friend, dear girl, and I beg of you that you would not desert my poor, helpless child in the hour when he will need you most. Give him the love that his mother would have given if Heaven had willed her poor life differently, and keep him from the knowledge of my unhappy fate if you can.

"Heaven bless you and keep you from the misery that has befallen me. As a last favour, I request that you give the enclosed to my husband with your own hands. Be good to my unfortunate child for my sake and for Heaven's sake!

"Your most wretched friend,

"BRENDA WARRENDER."

She read it over carefully when she had completed it. It sounded so cold, so bleak, so barren of feeling to her; and yet there was nothing else that she could say when her heart was breaking.

She folded it up and placed it in an envelope; then the pen was dipped into the ink again.

But the ink dried while the pen was still poised in the air. The red sun stole through the window-pane and fell upon the page, seeming to dye the white sheet with blood. She shivered slightly as she saw it, but still there was no hesitation.

"MY HUSBAND,—

"I am addressing you for the last time on this side of eternity, for to-morrow I shall



have entered that land where my poor life can no longer stand between you and your honour, to answer to my Maker for the crime of self-destruction. If I could but have died believing you true, Lionel. But there, I meant to utter no word of reproach, for in spite of the cruel past and the pitifully short future, I love you, and I am dying to save you from yourself and the consequences of your folly.

"You must forgive me that I am bringing this additional sorrow into your life, for I know it will be a sorrow to you; but in my ignorance and inexperience it is the only way open to me. I want to say no word to add to your grief and shame; but in this last hour, when death is already at my side, I hope the thought that I still love you, and that I forgive you, will be some consolation.

"I am dying, dear, to leave you free; but after I am gone will you not grant me two requests? The first is, that you lift the dishonour from our son's life by acknowledging him born in wedlock. Remember it is a dying mother who asks this of you, and as you hope for mercy before the judgment seat of Heaven, I charge you not to disregard it. It cannot harm you after the wife who stood in your way is dead. It is for that I am dying—that, and to save you from the vengeance that would come if I lived. Do not make my sacrifice useless. I beseech it of you as I beseech mercy of Heaven.

"The other is, that you tell my poor old broken father the truth. It is to lift his curse from my life that I ask it—a curse that I dare not have follow me in death.

"Be kind to my baby, Lionel. Your heart is not all hard. Try to love him, remembering that he will have no mother-hand to guide him in the right path, no mother-love to save him from danger. Do this for the sake of her who loved you too well to burden your life, and who bids you a long farewell!"

"BRENDA."

Not a sob, not a moan broke the horrible stillness of the room as she finished and folded the letter. She appeared like a creature out of marble in the dead inertness that had fallen upon her; but it did not last long.

She lifted the letter mechanically, folded it, put it in an envelope and addressed it, then inclosed it in the one she had addressed to Agnes Blunt.

Another followed to Raymond Bernstein, her cousin, in which she begged of him, for her sake, to spare the husband whom she had loved.

"I was his wife," she wrote; "I swear that to you, Raymond, and the sin is not his, but mine. When he acknowledges our little child, as he will do, I pray you take him by the hand and tell him that you forgive him for the wrong that you have done him even in thought. It is my last request, dear cousin, and by the great love that you bore me, I pray you to grant it."

"I am going before Heaven with a lie upon my lips as well as a sin upon my soul," she whispered, monotonously, to herself; "but Heaven will forgive me. He who knows our temptations will understand."

She slipped the letters into her pocket and looked about her. The sun was shining brightly; the rattle of the carts in the streets spoke of the throbbing life about her, and she shuddered as she realised how soon she should leave it all for ever! A great pity entered her heart for herself, and a tear dimmed her eye as she thought of that little cowering child whose tiny lips had never yet framed the sweet word "mother."

"It is madness!" she muttered, throwing up her head and endeavouring to banish the thought. "I must not, dare not think."

She tottered to her feet and stood for a moment listening intently. Not a sound broke the stillness of the house.

She fastened up her hair, put on her cloak, and softly opened the door.

Still not a sound! Very softly she crept down the stairs. The door opened readily

enough from the inside, and she let herself noiselessly into the street.

Very rapidly she walked to the nearest post-office and asked for stamps. With hands that scarcely trembled, she dropped the letters into the box, hesitated for a moment, then with bowed head she walked onward.

The river was such a little distance. At another time she would have thought it a long walk; but it seemed piteously short upon that morning. She meant to end all her suffering there. The cold waves would drown her sorrow.

That was as she had planned it.

But there was bustle and confusion about the piers. Life—everywhere joyous, throbbing life. Even the workmen seemed happy to her, because they were granted the blessed privilege of living. It had never seemed so sweet to her.

She leaned against a post in the most secluded spot and looked about her.

How dark and turbulent the water looked even under all the brilliant sunshine! Would her little child ever know that she had perished under one of them?

A hideous sob that threatened to strangle her arose in her throat. A longing too deep for words filled her heart to look upon that little face again, to feel that little head upon her breast. Her very soul seemed burning with the desire. She must see him—her baby—once more before the dark waves closed for ever above her head.

But those letters were gone beyond recall, and then there was her fear of Raymond Bernstein. She was striving to nerve herself for the fatal plunge when something—she knew not what—came floating down the river.

She looked at it, fascinated, for a moment as the waves washed it toward the shore; then a wild cry burst from her lips.

"Look!" she shrieked to one of the workmen, pointing her finger toward the dark object painfully outlined upon the breast of the water. "For Heaven's sake, look and tell me what is that awful thing!"

(To be continued.)

## HILDRED ELSINORE.

### CHAPTER VII.

LORD NETHERTON lived abroad. He had never spent many months in England since his wife's death, and when his daughter too was taken from him he became more and more of a wanderer. He mostly spent the winter in the sunny south, while in the spring and summer he settled down in a quaint old German town, where, surrounded by his books and waited on with affectionate assiduity by his old soldier-servant, time passed pleasantly enough.

He was the last of the direct line; at his death the peerage of Netherthon would be extinct, the estate and its revenue would revert to a distant cousin, a young soldier, of whom the Earl heard nothing but good. The old man's private fortune and large savings were at his own disposal, and there was a good deal of speculation among his acquaintance as to what he would do with them.

In the quaint old German town where the Earl spent so much of his time, there lived a literary man named Devenish, who was believed by a good many people to have a good chance of Lord Netherthon's savings. Mr. Devenish was a great favourite in the little English colony at Mächendorf. To begin with he was a bachelor, and in a community where women preponderated very largely an unattached man was a rarity. Then he was decidedly good-looking; he had ample means for his simple wants, and yet was not rich enough to make other people feel an unpleasant sense of poverty; and last, but not least, there was a tinge of mystery

about him which ladies found decidedly attractive.

He had arrived in Mächendorf; suddenly, no one knew from where he came, or what made him pitch his tent in the little old-world town. He brought no letter of introduction; he had not an acquaintance in the place; but there was something in his aristocratic bearing, in his handsome, sunburnt face, which impressed everybody, and a fortnight after his first appearance in the English church all the best English families, and a good many of the German ones, had called on him and pronounced Mr. Devenish an acquisition.

But it was Lord Netherthon to whom the stranger seemed most drawn. The Earl was old enough to have been his father, for, in spite of a few silver threads in his dark hair, everyone agreed Mr. Devenish could not be much over thirty. Between the two a close friendship sprang up, and it was generally taken for granted that whenever anything happened to the old nobleman Mr. Devenish would find himself handsomely remembered in the will.

Lord Netherthon strolled into his friend's abode the morning after his return from England. Devenish had been reading, but he flung away the book as his old friend entered, and welcomed him warmly.

"Back again, my lord! I hope you had a pleasant journey and enjoyed your visit to England."

"I shall never go back to Leamshire as long as I live," said the Earl, sadly. "I went down to the castle and spent a night there. I wanted to have a last look at the place my wife made such a happy home for me—but it was a mistake."

The younger man smiled half-sadly.

"I think, Lord Netherthon, it is always a mistake to go back to any place where one has been happy; but what troubled you? Had your agent been unfaithful? Was your property neglected?"

"Everything was in perfect order; but I had not been there for nearly twenty years. I felt like a stranger, and the only creature from whom I expected a welcome was dead."

"I remember now. You told me your daughter's dearest friend lived at Little Netherthon."

"She never lived there. Devenish, I believe that is what has put me out. I have been under a delusion for seventeen years. When I gave the living of Little Netherthon to Charles Elsinore I believed his wife was my Hildred's dearest friend, Lucy Tempest."

"Lucy Tempest has been dead for years," said Mr. Devenish, quickly. "I could have told you that much, Lord Netherthon!"

"It seems everyone knew it but me. It was a love match, Devenish, and, if you'll believe me, the man had forgotten her in a few months. He actually married again within a year of her death."

"For money or for love?"

"Not for money," said the Earl, with a shudder, "for he looks as poverty-stricken as a man can; and—he said—not for love. He was alone in the world with his child, and I suppose he had no backbone, and so he married the first woman who thought she would like to be his second wife."

"Did you see her?"

"Whom?"

"Mrs. Elsinore."

"No; I don't want to. I saw the child, Lucy's girl, you know. She was called after my daughter, another Hildred. She is a pretty creature. I should like to do something for her, Devenish."

"It wouldn't be difficult," said the younger man, smiling; "you are her father's patron and her mother's friend. Mr. Elsinore couldn't resent any kindness you might show his daughter."

"He doesn't look as if he had spirit to resent anything," said the Earl, rather contemptuously. "She is a pretty child. I should like to do something for her."

"Her grandmother will probably anticipate

you," said Devenish, quietly. "Lady Tempest must be a very rich woman, and that child is her only surviving relation."

The Earl opened his eyes.

"Come you are behindhand this time, Devenish. Lady Tempest is dead, and she left her whole property to a stranger."

"Just like her," said Mr. Devenish, gravely. "She was one of the most heartless women I ever met!"

"Did you know her well?"

Mr. Devenish parried the question.

"I was not a favourite of hers. Lord Netherton, did you see Captain Trefusis, and make the acquaintance of your heir?"

"No, I didn't," the old man smiled. "I heard a good deal about him, and I am sure he will make a worthy master for Netherton Castle; but I didn't see him. I am too old to make new friends, and I don't believe in caring for people just because they are your distant kindred. You, who have no drop of my blood in your veins, are dearer to me than Hugh Trefusis can ever be!"

But, close as was their friendship, Lord Netherton knew nothing of Mr. Devenish's guest. He would have been astonished could he have seen the young man after he had left, gazing up and down the room like a caged lion, an expression of feverish restlessness on his handsome face.

"Shall I go back?" he asked himself, bitterly, speaking aloud unconsciously in his agitation. "After ten years of exile, I am free at last to return to my native land—shall I go back?"

He stopped abruptly in his walk, and threw himself down on a low chair as though wearied out in mind and body.

"It was a mad act," he muttered to himself. "England was wide enough for me to go out different ways. Why, because I could not have what I longed for, did I condemn myself to exile? Ten years, the best years of my life, gone—wasted; nothing to show for them; and now that the barrier is removed, and I am free to return to England if I would, what is the use?"

"Ten years of exile must have changed me. My dearest friends would not know me. I don't suppose through the length and breadth of England there is a human creature who would welcome my home-coming. I should be forgotten in England than I am here."

But this decision did not prevent his dropping a word to Lord Netherton a few days later; nothing definite, only just a hint he might run over to England when the summer came.

"Well, till I am gone," said the old man, eagerly. "I am seventy-eight, Devenish, and I shall not last much longer; don't grudge me the only companionship I value in the evening of my life."

And Mr. Devenish waited. After all, what chance was there for haste? There was no one in England expecting him; no one counting the weeks and days to his return.

The Earl learned more of his favourite's history after this than he had ever heard before.

Mr. Devenish owed most of his modest income to a legacy from a friend he had made abroad, an old man whose only son had taken a great fancy to the young traveller.

"It was passing strange," said Mr. Devenish; "young Ralph had a happy home, a father who idolised him, good prospects, and ample wealth. The fever attacked us both, it spared me, and carried him off in the prime of his youth."

"And you stayed with his father?"

"I couldn't well help it," said Devenish, with a sigh. "He seemed to adopt me in his son's stead, and I had no one to care what became of me. We travelled half over the world together, and when he died and left me his fortune I came here."

And Lord Netherton, listening to the simple story, never guessed that Devenish had omitted the romance of his life, a romance

whose last page was closed before he left England.

"I shall leave that little girl a legacy," the Earl said, suddenly, to Devenish one summer evening. "I hope her step-mother won't take it away from her. I wish you would be her trustee."

"Mrs. Elsinore couldn't rob her step-child, the law wouldn't let her," replied Jim Devenish, simply; "but I'll be trustee if you like, Lord Netherton."

No inspiration warned the old nobleman that the girl he wished to save was even then in sore straits for the want of money. He never dreamed that pressure was being put on Hildred Elsinore from all sides to make her accept David Gibson. At seventy-eight the mind moves but slowly. Lord Netherton resolved to benefit Hildred at his death, which he thought could not be far distant; he never troubled about how the poor child might be getting on meanwhile. And so the very evening on which he fixed the amount of her legacy, far away in her father's study Hildred was listening to the pleadings of her lover.

"You will say yes, my darling," urged David. "You shall not be hurried, I won't ask you to come to me just yet, if only you will promise some day to be my wife."

"Will you give me till to-morrow?" she besought him. "David, you are very generous to care for me, and I would trust you willingly, only—I don't love you. Will you give me till to-morrow?"

"I will give you three days," he answered, kindly; "but, oh! my little love, be merciful, and don't refuse me."

He was gone. For a few moments Hildred lay perfectly still on the shabby sofa. The air laden with the scent of roses and mignonette came in from the open window and fanned her cheeks—she did not even feel it. Her mind was filled with but one thought, the question she had to decide—should she become David Gibson's wife?

If only she had liked him less it would have been easier; but David had been so good to her all her life. She had clung to him in childish troubles—as to some big brother. She knew he was loyal and true, and yet she could not love him.

She never blinded herself to this. She never tried to believe that "love would come." She felt that if she married David one-half of her, the higher, nobler part, must slumber for all time.

She had thoughts and feelings he could not understand, dreams and ambitions into which he could not enter. She might force her body into the dull unemotional round of duties awaiting her at Highlands Farm, but her mind— if she waited now, would she not weary a hundred times more than.

She would be just like a poor caged bird; and oh, Heaven, help her! would she not grow in time to hate the hand that imprisoned her—her husband's?

"I cannot do it," came at last from the girl's overcharged heart. "I cannot do it. Mother will be dreadfully angry. I shall have to go away and work for my own living; but I think father will understand, and working ever so hard will be better than marrying poor old David just for the sake of a home and food and clothes."

The door opened, and Mrs. Elsinore appeared. She had not spent a pleasant evening, for she had felt it her duty to enlighten Martha as to the object of David's visit, and Martha had been decidedly too candid in her comments.

"Dreda would be miserable with him," said the sixteen-year-old lady; "he can't understand any of the things she cares for."

"He is very fond of her."

"Oh, I know," said Martha, rather bitterly, "he is fond of her. He would like to shut her up in a glass case and worship her, but it wouldn't make Dreda happy; and David is much too good to be married just because he can afford to keep a wife."

Mrs. Elsinore felt as if her training had

failed utterly. Here was her favourite, Martha, sitting against her.

"I never thought you would turn against your mother!"

"I don't, mother."

"You are ready to encourage Hildred in her disobedience, to make her turn up her nose at a most deserving young man."

"David's more than that," cried Martha, hotly. "He's got a good true heart, and he oughtn't to have Hildred just because he's well off. They'd both be miserable, for they'd never understand each other, and they deserve something better;" and with that the second Mrs. Elsinore flounced out of the room; and the mother began to fear, in spite of her being only sixteen, Martha knew too much about love.

"Well, Hildred," said Mrs. Elsinore, meaningly, "what have you to tell me?"

Hildred felt all her courage ebbing out at her finger tips, but for all that her mind was made up. She would not marry David if she was sent away that very night in disgrace.

"Nothing, mamma."

"Oh, you are shy!" returned the mother, practically; "but these things have to be spoken of or there would be no wedding. I am delighted at David's wishes; Hildred, she's a good fellow, and, with nine girls, it's a blessing to have the eldest engaged."

"But, mamma, I am now going to marry David. I asked him to give me till to-morrow, and he said he would wait three days."

"If you asked for time that was equivalent to accepting him."

"I believe I meant to try," admitted Hildred; "but when he was gone I saw I couldn't do it. He is so good and generous, it would be mean to take all he has and give him nothing; and I don't love him—I never shall."

"You are talking like a sentimental idiot," said her stepmother, savagely. "You owe yourself your life to David Gibson. I don't suppose you care more for anyone else?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then the liking will grow into love when you are settled down at Highlands Farm with no one but David to think about. When you feel you owe him everything you will soon get to love him. You would be a very wicked girl if you did not."

"I think I should get to hate him," Hildred whispered. "Just the feeling I owed everything to him, that I had someone to look to, and that I was tied to David for ever; all that would drive me mad—or kill me!"

"I think you are mad now," said Mrs. Elsinore, harshly. "What do you suppose is to become of us all if you quarrel with your bread-and-butter like this? Your father has only two hundred a year; the children are growing up—do you want them to be ashamed to your usefulness?"

"I will go away," said Hildred, sadly; "I will try and earn my own living. I don't mind how hard I work, but I cannot marry for a home."

"If you work your fingers to the bone," retorted her stepmother, "you won't do more than keep yourself. If you married David, you would be able to help your father. Mistress of a good house like that, there's many a little thing you could do for us, besides having one or two of the children with you pretty often. But there, I always said you were a selfish girl, and I was right."

Hildred was not disappointed in her father—the Rector understood.

His wife gave her own version of the affair, but Charles Elsinore went into his study, called Hildred, and fastened the door on themselves, while he told her very simply she was free to please herself.

"Young Gibson is a good fellow," the Rector said, simply, "and if you could have cared for him, I could have given you to him without a fear; but, my darling, kind and generous as these people are, you were born to something different. I am a poor man now, but my family held their own in



Yorkshire, and your mother was the belle of a London season, the chosen friend of Lady Hildred Carr—Lord Netborton's only child."

The girl was looking so astonished that he explained,—

"Your own mother, Hildred, not my present wife. My dear, the truth was kept from you in all kindness, but I think the time has come for you to know it. I married again when you were a baby, Hildred, and my wife has been a good mother to you."

The words were a revelation; they explained so much to Hildred: why Mrs. Elsinore had never loved her as she loved the others; why, ever since she could remember anything, she had felt herself to be an apart.

"Papa," said the poor child, bravely, "I cannot marry David, but I will go away. I know mother won't be able to bear the sight of me now."

The Rector passed his hand caressingly over her pretty head.

"Your aunt sent you a message, Hildred; she wants you to go and see her."

Mrs. Warrington was not rich—none of the Elsinores were—but she was several degrees more prosperous than the Rector of Little Netborton.

She had not met her brother for years till he claimed her hospitality for one night; and something in his tired, patient face had touched her heart and made her send that really warm invitation.

"Are you sure, papa?"

"Quite. Bessie said 'one of the girls,' and you are the eldest, so it is your right. Besides, Hildred, though my sister is not a rich woman, she moves in very good society, and knows far more of the world than I do. I should think she might be able to find you some situation where in return for your services you could improve yourself in music."

The child—she was only eighteen—looked into his face with dimmed eyes.

"Papa," she whispered, "won't you please tell me something about my mother—my own mother?"

"She was very beautiful, my dear, and we loved each other so well that she was content to give up wealth and station, home and friends for my sake, and begin her married life in a dingy east-end suburb. I only kept her with me eleven months, and when she left me it seemed the light of my life went out."

"But you married again?" breathed Hildred, with almost an accent of reproach.

"I married again, my dear, and my second wife has been a good and faithful friend to me. I am deeply attached to her; but she never filled your mother's place in my heart. Hildred, love like that comes but once."

And looking into his face his daughter knew he meant just what he said, and that though her mother had been dead eighteen long years, and for seventeen of them another woman had borne his name, yet the void in his heart was still unfilled, and it was the memory of his own love story which made him so thoroughly understand his child. Mrs. Elsinore was simply furious when she heard that Hildred was to be allowed to refuse David Gibson, and then, instead of being packed off to earn her own living as best she could, was to have the pleasure of visiting her aunt. The Rector's wife had gauged Mrs. Warrington's position pretty correctly, and knew that if not to be called rich, she was yet in far easier circumstances than her brother.

"It's all of a piece," she told Hildred, bitterly, "you've always been the bane of my life, and I expect you always will. You're allowed to flout an honest man, and go off pleasure-seeking, while my girls stay and work hard at home. If your mother was such a fine lady it's a pity her family don't do something for you. I brought your father fifty pounds a year, which has gone into the house-keeping ever since I married him. I never heard his first wife brought him fifty pence."

"Hush, my dear!" came the Rector's voice, unexpectedly breaking in on the scene. He had been passing, and overheard the last

taunt, so came to Hildred's rescue. "Hush, it is not the child's fault she can't think quite as we do; and, as to money, if she did not bring me a dowry, my Lucy brought me something more valuable, since it was for her sake Lord Netborton gave me this living. It is quite true," he went on, noting the incredulity on his wife's face, "she and his daughter, Lady Hildred Carr, were great friends. The Earl was at our wedding."

"Well," said Mrs. Elsinore, when her husband departed, having, as he hoped, propitiated her, "if that's true, perhaps Lord Netborton will leave you something Hildred?"

Hildred shook her head.

"I don't expect a shilling," she said, simply. "I am quite willing to work for my living, if only Aunt Bessie can find me a situation; and if only you'd forgive me, mother, and wish me 'good speed!' I shouldn't mind anything."

Mrs. Elsinore intimated she might think of it; but help came to Hildred from an unexpected quarter.

David's father and mother fully appreciated the sacrifice which made the girl leave her home and go into the world rather than marry without love.

"If you could have fancied my boy had made you a good husband, Dreda," said Mrs. Gibson; "but it's brave of you to go out and earn your bread rather than win a good home by swearing a falsehood; and you'll always have a friend while I and the mother live."

"Yes," answered the father, "nevertheless, my dear, there's a deal of winning of the main chance, and girls are too ready to say love is old-fashioned and doesn't matter; but there's a deal of wear and tear in married life, Hildred, and if it hadn't love to smoothe it the chain'd be hard and irksome. Davy's a man and must bear his own burden; but I don't see anyone's a right to cast it up to you that you couldn't do as he wished."

And David's own farewell was simpler still.

"Heaven bless you, Dreda, darling; and if ever there comes a day when you feel you can change your mind, only let me know and I'll come to you if it's to the other end of the world."

## CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was the shadow of a great sorrow over 89, Delaporte-road. Mrs. Robson's customers were obliged to confide their dresses to someone else, for the mother hardly left her daughter's sick room.

No card appeared in the parlour window, for the widow could not have waited on a lodger had she had one.

For women! all her thoughts, all her energies seemed to centre in that upper room where her only child lay with the cruel fever sapping her strength, the light of delirium blazing in her beautiful eyes, and her wandering brain always troubled with the same dread fear that her lover had been murdered by his false friend.

Mrs. Robson felt as though she must have been blind all those summer days not to have seen the attachment between Nan and Claude Maitland; but she had been used to a young man about the house ever since her daughter was a child, and after the girl grew up it never entered the mother's head any of her lodgers would make love to her.

Besides, Nan was not like other girls; she seemed to have no thought of flirtations and such things. Her "stories" took all her interest; and if anyone had asked her, the widow would have declared in good faith that Nan had no time to think of love or lovers.

It must have been an extra pang to the mother as she watched by Nan's sick-bed to realise how utterly her child had deceived her. No one could listen to the girl's ravings without seeing her whole heart was Claude Maitland's, and that she regarded herself as his promised wife, and yet she had always spoken

of him to her mother as indifferently as if he had been a stranger.

Even in the terrible three weeks between his disappearance and her own illness, when day after day her mother would exclaim at his mysterious silence, Nan had kept her own counsel and never betrayed her secret until she heard Dr. Tucker suggest her lover had met with foul play.

As the doctor had told Guy Bertram, he took an unusual interest in Nan because he had known her from a child.

He proved this by undertaking the long journey into Blankshire, simply because he would not leave a stone unturned in his efforts to find the missing man. His partner might exclaim at his giving up the best part of a day to the expedition, but the doctor persisted; as he told Mr. Friar after his return, if he had not gone he should always have felt he had missed a chance.

John Friar was much younger; indeed he had only just been admitted a junior partner on paying a sum of money, inherited from an aunt, for a third share of Dr. Tucker's practice.

He was much attached to his amon, having originally been his assistant. A few years ago he had occupied Mrs. Robson's parlour, and so his—as Dr. Tucker put it—want of interest in Nan rather incensed the older man.

"I believe you grudge my journey just because it has given you a little extra work," said the doctor, rather crossly, for he was tired and disappointed at his failure.

"You don't think that really," replied John Friar, smiling. "He had one of the pleasantest smiles you ever saw. The fact is, doctor, I believe if you could find Mr. Maitland and brought him to the poor girl's bedside, you would be doing her the worst turn in your power."

"It would save her life."

Mr. Friar shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly; but life isn't everything."

"It would make her happy."

"It is not my idea of happiness for a girl to be tied to a man who is weary of her."

"What do you mean, Friar?"

"That there is one explanation of Maitland's disappearance, so simple it never occurred to you. I believe he went away because he was tired of Nan—a thoroughly bad man soon tires of a simple, true-hearted woman. He hadn't the courage to tell her he had been playing with her, and there must be an end of it, so he took himself off."

"But his clothes?" suggested the doctor, practically.

"That is the one weak point in my theory. Leave the clothes alone for a moment, and try and look at things from my point of view."

"Well?"

"Maitland disappeared on the twenty-ninth of August! Now, I have been at the trouble to make inquiries at hospitals, and of the police. No accident whatever occurred to anyone answering his description on that day. Mrs. Robson says he meant to return that night; if so, why was everything in his room arranged with such special care? The poor woman persuaded me to look in one day, and I declare to you the drawers and boxes were 'got up' for inspection. His desk was full of paper, but contained no scrap of writing, yet writing was the man's one means of subsistence, and the little servant declares she emptied the waste-paper basket for him three times the day before! A man doesn't destroy every trace of his writing without design. The lawyers tell you they paid him over fifty pounds the week before. Either he took his passage to some distant country with part of it, or he spent it in establishing himself in other lodgings far away from Folham. I can't say which, but I would stake my life on my opinion: when he left Delaporte road he never meant to return."

"And you go so far as to say if we could find him it would be cruel kindness to bring him back?"



[THE RECTOR PASSED HIS HAND CARESSINGLY OVER HILDRED'S PRETTY HEAD.]

"Yes. He might be touched by Nan's illness; he might come back to save her life; but the same motive which made him forsake her before would take him away again. She is only a plaything to him, and he is selfish to the core. You have seen him yourself?"

"Not to speak to."

"Well, you know his appearance. He is a fine gentleman to the finger-tips. Such a man as that couldn't settle down *en famille* with Mrs. Robson without a sacrifice. He wouldn't like his wife's mother to make dresses and let lodgings, it would offend his prejudices. He might marry Nan on an impulse of pity, but he would be ashamed of her and let her see it sooner or later."

Dr. Tucker shook his head. He only looked at the medical aspect of the case. The crisis in Nan's illness was coming. Only sleep could save her, and it was his opinion those beautiful hazel eyes would never close in slumber until her mind was set at rest. Even now they always seemed to ask him what he had done with her lover.

He told Mrs. Robson of his journey to Coppleigh, and Mr. Bertram's denial of all knowledge of Maitland's address.

"I can never thank you enough, sir," the poor woman said gratefully. "It was good of you to think of it, and it's a comfort to feel everything has been tried; but, Dr. Tucker, I don't believe Mr. Maitland is alive, or he couldn't have the heart to desert my child. I think it's as she says, poor lamb, and he's met with foul play."

Dr. Tucker had meant never to leave the house the last hours before the crisis; but he was summoned to an important case a mile off. The wife of a well-to-do shopkeeper was expecting her first child, and needed Dr. Tucker's skill. He knew he might be detained till morning; there was nothing for it but to ask his partner to take his place in Delaporte-road.

"It will be about midnight, Friar," he told the young man, anxiously. "Nothing can

save her but sleep. I believe if only you could satisfy her mind about Maitland we might save her even yet. She's young and has a good constitution."

John Friar reached the house soon after ten. Nan had been moved into the large front bedroom, and she lay there now looking almost like a broken lily, so terribly fragile and ethereal was her beauty. Mrs. Robson sat by the bedside, every energy absorbed in watching her daughter. A lady who had been sitting by the fire crossed to the doctor's side. It was Mrs. May, wife of the vicar of St. Ursula's. She had come across to share the widow's sad vigil, feeling she ought not to be alone, and not counting the little maid as any companion.

"I shall stay the night," she whispered to Mr. Friar. "If you do not think anything will be wanted I shall send the servant to bed. She is only a child, and it seems cruel to leave her alone downstairs."

He shook his head.

"She may take a little nourishment perhaps, we shall want nothing but what is here," and he glanced at a table on which stood wine and beef-tea.

Mrs. May went downstairs, and sent off K-ziah to her bed. She lingered a few minutes to make a cup of strong tea, which she carried up to Mrs. Robson. As she passed through the little passage, she fancied she heard the sound of someone moving in the back parlour which had been Mr. Maitland's bedroom.

She was a sensible, middle-aged woman, and yet she shivered. The mystery of the young man's fate had never been cleared up, and coming straight from what soon might be the chamber of death, her nerves were somewhat shaken; for one moment she wondered if his betrothed's danger had brought his spirit back to earth.

Only for a moment, then she could have scolded herself for her folly; of course there were no such things as ghosts, and there was

no proof whatever that Claude Maitland was dead.

Mrs. Robson drank the tea gratefully, the clock of St. Ursula's struck eleven, and then the three resumed their places, and waited.

Dr. Tucker had said the crisis would be about midnight, but it wanted nearly twenty minutes to twelve, when suddenly, without a moment's warning, the girl raised herself in bed to a sitting position, and cried in a clear strong voice,—

"Claude, Claude, my darling! where are you?"

The watchers looked at each other. It was the question they had expected and feared. On their answer to it probably hung Nan's life; yet, what could they tell her?

They had no need to speak. Almost before they had glanced at each other in anxious doubt, the door opened. Mrs. May clung to the back of her chair for support; for the figure that came slowly towards the bed was Claude Maitland's!

The face was pale as death. He looked worn, haggard, almost as though he had come himself from a couch of sickness in answer to that cry.

"I am here, Nan," he said, quietly.

"Beloved, I am here." His arms were round her. The yearning dread, the terrible haunting fear died out of her beautiful eyes; the head fell back upon Maitland's shoulder, the breath came softly and regularly as a little child's. The watchers drew a sigh of relief; for the crisis was over, and Nan slept.

(To be continued.)

At Hyderabad, India, a photographic studio has been opened, in which the operators are all women. The Koran forbids the making of portraits, but the mufitis have declared that photography cannot be included in the prohibition, since the prophet knew nothing about it.





[WHILE THE DOG AND CHILD PLAYED, JACK SAT AND TALKED TO MAUDE, AND SO THE TIME PASSED PLEASANTLY ENOUGH.]

## LADY LINDESAY.

## [A NOVELETTE.]

## CHAPTER I.

"She is the handsomest woman here," said one.

"And the youngest as well," said another.

"My dear fellow, she is at least five years older than I am, and I was—let me see—thirty-two last Easter," returned the first.

And yet to all appearance the mistake was a pardonable one; for as Marion Lindesay walked down the room with handsome Jack Carstairs of the Guards as her partner, it would never have occurred to the many present who did not know her history, that she was verging on the forties. Her cousin and hostess, Lady Boldremont, whispered to a lady friend that she had never seen Marion look so lovely; and the friend suppressing the righteous indignation which a mother of two marriageable daughters must feel when she sees a widow monopolizing the attention of all the most eligible men in the room, had agreed with her, and had merely done justice to her wonderful charms. And Lady Lindesay, moreover, looked supremely happy, as any woman had a right to be who, despite her real age, was in dress and personal beauty the acknowledged belle of one of the smartest and most crowded functions of the season. For Lady Boldremont's Ball was an event looked forward to by all, and to be a success at it was to be a success for the year.

But Marion had another reason, known only to herself and her partner, for her happiness that day. Poor woman! It had been her fate through life to know more grief than pleasure. She was little more than a child when, nearly twenty years before, she had yielded to her mother's tears, and married Charles Lindesay, the wealthy, dissipated heir

of an old Scotch baronet. It was the old old story, an unholy bargain in which peerless beauty had been put in the balance on one side, handsome settlements on the other; and before she was eighteen, or knew her own mind, or had seen enough of the world to choose aright, Marion was bound for ever to a brute in human form. He was over forty when she married him, and the story of his wickedness was common property in the circle where he moved, and people cried shame on the parents who handed so young and innocent a girl over to the tender mercies of such a tiger as Charles Lindesay was known to be.

Nothing but her indomitable pride saved Marion from utter wreck and ruin. Of the last fifteen years, and the misery she endured, she never spoke to anyone, and not even her mother, who too late discovered what manner of slavery it was to which she had sold her daughter, knew what that daughter suffered—her poor mother who had died beseeching her injured child's forgiveness. But she won in the end, and in spite of her beauty with its dangerous influence, and the hatred fostered by her husband's outrageous neglect and cruelty, she had emerged triumphant from the ordeal, and to-day was able to look back without regret to the miserable wasted years of her married life.

Her husband's death had left her rich. Her parents' forethought had secured that, and though there was no son to succeed to the title, Sir Charles had exhausted his ingenuity in vain in trying to break the settlements. Her trustees were too sharp for that, and when after her two years' widowhood, Lady Lindesay reappeared in society, it was as a rich and still young woman; and many a girl looked inquiringly across the opera at the beautiful widow, and many a man sighed as he saw her roll past in her carriage as he thought of his own loneliness. They thought her happy, and so she was, but not in the way they meant; for it was her freedom which made up her happiness, not her wealth, her station or that

wondrous beauty which seemed never to fail her.

And yet on this night, when, above all others, her happiness was genuine and undisguised, she had in her heart a secret which heavily affected that freedom she prized so much. For on that afternoon she had yielded to the pleading of the handsome boy (for Jack Carstairs was little more), and, forgetting the difference in their ages, had promised to become his wife. She knew people would say she was far too old to marry him, that she would be wiser not to marry at all; but her lover's pleading, and her own weak woman's heart had carried the day, and, setting the opinion of the world at defiance, she had consented to engage herself to the handsome young fellow, who was far too young to marry, who had no means to support a wife, who was only really bitten with that species of calf-love which compels a boy to admire women far older than himself, and whose changeable nature was quite incapable of reciprocating the constancy of a true woman's heart. It seemed to her a noble and self-sacrificing act on Jack's part to marry one like her, for, woman-like, she could not see her own great and noble nature, or guess the fickleness of the man she loved. And when presently the dance was over, and Jack relinquished her to the care of his host, she watched him walk away, with a heart so full of love and tenderness and devotion as, had he known it, must have touched the man who had that day asked her hand.

It was a change for her from dreamland to reality when Lord Boldremont began to speak to her. Though far older than herself he had always been very fond of her, and throughout the troubles of her married life had been her great support—often the only friend to whom she was able to turn. He had openly expressed his opinion of her being compelled to marry; and though Marion heard nothing of it at the time, afterwards it had reached her ears, and given her a high opinion of Lord Boldremont's

sagacity; and even to the time of the story he still held a high place in her regard, and his views weighed more with her than those of all the rest of the world put together.

"How are you, Marion?" he said, cheerily. "I have not seen you for an age. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Much what I have always done," she answered, trying to conceal her embarrassment under an affectation of indifference. "The same dreary round of gaieties that grows more troublesome as one grows older."

"You never grow older, Marion," he answered, looking at her with genuine admiration. "To see you just now dancing, one would have said that you were the youngest girl in the room."

"Thanks," she answered, laughing; "but, unfortunately, my looking-glass tells another tale. It is no use trying to hide one's real age from you in any case; you know as well as myself that I shall be thirty-eight in October."

"Well! you're a wonderful woman, Marion, you don't look it. By the way, that reminds me I wanted to give you a hint. It is all very well to feel young, but one can overdo it."

"What do you mean, Hugh?" she said, laughing, little suspecting what was coming.

"Well! if you will dance, choose your partners more judiciously; that's what I mean. It looks silly to see you dancing about with that curly-headed Jacksnaps. Really, Marion, for a sensible woman you sometimes behave very foolishly; you've been seen a great deal together lately, and people are beginning to talk."

Truly his Lordship was a blunt man, who called a spade a spade. Lady Lindsey had to call into action all her resources to preserve her composure.

"Do you mean Jack Carstairs?" she asked, more haughtily than was her wont with her cousin.

"Yes, I do. He is a silly young fellow at best. Boys of that age are not a very nice class at any time; and he is not a very good specimen. Drop him quietly, Marion, before more tongues start wagging. A woman of your age should be careful, and you have plenty of nice men to associate with, without making a favourite of that empty-headed boy."

Marion Lindsey almost felt her heart stand still. Cold water poured over her could not have had a more stunning effect. But she was a brave woman and not one to be talked out of any resolution she had formed. She thought she would turn the tables on Jack's cousin, so she determined to enlighten his lordship a little.

"Don't be cross, Hugh," she said, gently. "I have a secret for you, but don't tell any one, will you?"

"Another secret," he said, with a laugh. "I hoped we had done with them."

He alluded to the fact that during her husband's lifetime he had often received her confidences.

"Not quite," she said; "though I hope this will be the very last of them. I only wanted to tell you that I am engaged to be married."

"You—~~are—engaged—to—be—married!~~" gasped the other.

"Yes. But you need not publish the fact. I am really quite serious, Hugh. You need not doubt me."

"And who then is the happy man?" he asked.

"Jack Carstairs!"

"Bosh—simple undoubted bosh," exclaimed his lordship.

He really thought she was only making fun of him.

"Not in the least," she said, firmly. "I mean it. He asked me to-day to marry him, and I said yes."

"Marion, are you serious?" The other's face was clouded now.

"Yes, I am."

"Then," he answered, rally, "I am un-

feignedly sorry for you. I see Julia yonder. Please excuse me, I think she wants me."

Marion knew it was but an excuse to escape. She knew his disapproval was real, and she regretted it. For once in his life Lord Boldremont was wrong, so she thought, Jack was an angel; and she summoned him by a look to her side, and asked him to take her to her carriage.

He did so, but she saw with regret that his manner had already changed. In very truth Master Jack had been considerably troubled that evening by his younger friends regarding his passion for her ladyship. No man likes chaff, a very young man least of all, and he was in a wily humor.

He drove with Lady Lindsey as far as the house, and there he got out and walked home. Then he smoked and drank whisky and soda by himself for an hour or two, and savagely meditated over what he was beginning to consider his folly.

But in another place Marion Lindsey was sleeping peacefully in her new-found happiness. No matter what others might say, Jack was a dear good fellow, of that she was certain. But she was nevertheless wrong.

## CHAPTER II.

It was barely one o'clock on the day following his wife's ball that Lord Boldremont rang the bell at Lady Lindsey's house in Arden Crescent. He was at once admitted and shown upstairs to Marion's drawing-room, where he found her writing letters.

"How are you after your fatigues last night, Marion?" he asked, as he shook hands with her.

"Very well, thank you," replied Lady Lindsey. "How is Constance after all her exertions? I am sure she deserves a rest."

"Yes, and she is taking it. But, Marion, I did not come here to speak of her; I came about your affairs."

A shade of annoyance passed over the woman's fair face, but she had learnt to curb her temper, and, above all, she had no wish to quarrel with her cousin.

"Is it necessary to refer to them just now?" she asked.

"Very necessary. You see, Marion, I stand as your trustee in a very responsible position, and—well, I hope, my dear girl, you'll forgive my saying it—I am also a great deal older than you, and I have seen a good deal of the world. But perhaps you know your business best."

"Say what you have to say," she answered.

"Were you serious in what you told me last night?"

"Perfectly."

"I'm sorry to hear it. Marion, is it too late?"

"My dear Hugh, you need not try to dissuade me. My mind is quite made up."

"I can only repeat that I am sorry to hear it. But, Marion, is the game quite worth the candle?"

"In what way?" she asked.

"Why, I suppose you are old enough to have done with love's young dream."

"I am old enough to know my own mind, and also to know when my own happiness is involved."

"It will take a great deal of happiness to make up for what you lose, won't it?"

"Love! what do I lose?" she asked.

"Well, I am afraid that when you come to put the matter in the light of profit and loss you will gain Mr. Carstairs and lose £5,000 a year."

"£5,000 a year! I thought you told me my jointure was £6,000 for my life."

"Or during widowhood, Marion. We have never had much conversation about your affairs since just after Charles' death, and I could hardly tell you when he was barely under the ground, tell you that he had had the not unusual proviso put in your settlements. Men

don't care for a successor. "I mean," he added, hastily catching himself, "you owe it entirely to me that you will on remembrance have even £1,000 a year."

"£1,000 a year, is that all!" she said, thoughtfully.

It was impossible for her to avoid looking round her luxurious room and wondering how much of this would have to be given up. But she had little time to think, for a servant opened the door and announced,—

"Mr. Carstairs."

Jack walked in smiling, shook hands with Marion, and bowed to Lord Boldremont whom he knew very slightly.

His lordship rose to go.

"Well, good-bye, Marion. You'll think over what I have been saying," was his parting speech.

"Yes, I will. Can't you stop to luncheon, Hugh?"

He shook his head, and went his way in a more hopeful spirit than when he arrived. He had ascertained that Jack Carstairs had not much towards keeping up such an establishment, and the sincerely hoped Marion had sense enough to see the folly of such a marriage when she had time to think things over.

"Why did you ask him to stop to luncheon?" asked Jack, smiling, as soon as the door closed.

"He is the oldest and best friend I have in the world, Jack," she answered. "It is as well you should understand that at once."

"Oh! of course, I understand that. But all the same, Marion, you asked me to come here and talk over business matters, and I think it is rather hard lines you should have another man here when I come."

"Of course Jack, dear," she said, soothingly. "I know it is; but really, he came uninvited and I could not turn away so old a friend even for you."

"All right. Now, May, there are several things we've got to discuss, and I think for all reasons we had better get it done before luncheon."

"Certainly," she answered. "What is to be said?"

"Well! first of all, when and how do you want it given out?" asked Jack.

Lady Lindsey hesitated. Her experience with Lord Boldremont had not been encouraging.

"Do you think we need decide about that at once?" she answered.

"Just as you like," was his reply. "But you know people will talk, and once you have got the announcement over they have to keep civil."

"All the same, Jack, I think I should prefer to wait. Keeping it a secret can make no difference to you and me, and we shall cause less sensation if we give out our engagement among the others at the end of the season."

"Right. If you don't mind, I don't," was his reply.

Sad to say, Jack felt relieved at his fiancée's decision. It prolonged his freedom for a good long time, and he meant to make the most of it.

"After that," he said, presently, "it is hardly necessary for us to come to the second question, that of our marriage, that can stand over for the present."

He little thought, as he dismissed himself of this last remark, of the pain he inflicted on the woman before him. Marion's faithful woman's heart was a great deal more touched than that of the careless young fellow whose wife she had consented to be. And to her, with her bitter experience, marriage was something more serious than it was to him. She thought, with a feeling akin to dread, that he had changed greatly in the last twenty-four hours. And she was right, though she could not fathom the reason. She did not know how seldom a man can be, or how, when once successful, the prize he has striven and fought for, loses half its value. "Very different," says a wise old Persian poet, "is the man



who is waiting for his lady-love, from the man who has had a full dinner," and yet satiety is the only difference.

But Marion managed to conceal her fears and to answer bravely enough.

"There is a good deal to be thought of before that, Jack," she said. "We've got to talk about ways and means, and where to live, and so on."

"Can't we live here?" he asked, in surprise.

"Scarcely, unless you are a richer man than I take you for," she replied.

A horrible dread fell upon her lover. He had never thought of asking about her means, and had taken it for granted that she was as rich as her surroundings. He had a very clear idea that his own private income and pay together were hardly enough to keep a fellow in clothes and cigars, and that there were one or two debts he could get his father to pay off on the strength of his brilliant marriage. He was not really mercenary, but he certainly expected his future wife to keep up such an establishment as she had been accustomed to.

"I," he said with a short laugh,—"I have £800 a year."

"And I shall have £1,000," said Marion.

"Jack's eye ran round the room, not, as she supposed, querying how it could be so little, but in wonder if £1,600 a year would keep the pot boiling."

"I had better explain the mystery, Jack," she said, a little uneasily. "The £1,000 a year is what I keep on marrying a second time. I have a great deal more now."

Something in what she said, or in the way she said it, touched the best side of the young fellow's nature. It seemed to him, just then, that she was sacrificing a good deal for his sake, and it was in no spirit of brag or of conventional vanity that he rose, and, placing his arm round her waist, bent over and kissed her.

"My own darling!" he said, hoarsely, "I had no idea what you were giving up for me. Please Heaven, I will do my best to make what we have go as far as we can—I will, indeed."

And he really meant it then. As for Marion Lindsey, she was in the Seventh Heaven. He seemed to her so tender, so noble, so good that she almost imagined that it was he who was making the sacrifice; and as for Lord Boldremon's warnings—they were scattered to the wind.

So they were a merry party at Rinehead, and when they separated each was in the Seventh Heaven, and fully determined that, come what might, they would be true.

But as time went on they learnt what a dangerous toy a secret engagement is. Do what they would with all their care and circumspection, they were so much together that people's tongues would wag. Lord Boldremon, of course, heard the chatter, and coupling it with certain private information he had regarding Mr. Carstairs' income and extravagance, used all his influence to open Lady Lindsey's eyes.

But this was no more efficacious than was Jack's undisguised flirtations with women younger than herself. Marion was determined to marry the young fellow, and flattered herself that once the knot was tied she would settle down, and nothing that occurred could shake her resolution. But while she could not help feeling his neglect, Jack Carstairs on his part thought her exacting. He flattered himself he was only having his last fling; but as the days wore on he found himself sometimes wondering whether he had not made a mistake, and almost hoped time might set him free.

So the season came to an end and in the ordinary course of things everybody who was anybody scattered to the four quarters of the globe. Jack was not at all sorry for his part that his duties kept him in town, and that though he occasionally wrote very devoted letters to Marion, the fact of his being necessary to preserve secrecy prevented his sending too many letters to the places where she was stopping.

### CHAPTER III.

STILL there was no disguising the fact that it is very unpleasant to have to stay in town when all one's friends and most of one's brother officers are away. To Jack Carstairs London in August was as the desert of the Sahara, and it must be confessed with shame that the daily letters he received, the outpourings of Lady Lindsey's tender loving soul, did not improve his temper or spirits.

In Marion's presence, under the influence of the glamour of her beautiful face and noble nature, he was deeply in love, it is true, but away from her his fickle nature kept contrasting her with some younger beauty, not always to her advantage.

It had been a terribly hot summer, and August was its hottest month. To Jack Carstairs, to whose ideas the rolling millions of the great metropolis were nothing, if only society was out of town, the dreariness of his daily life was insufferable. At last he even grew to hate his almost solitary dinner at his club, and one evening, tempted by the cooler atmosphere, he thought of taking a stroll in the park and giving his dog "Cæsar," a magnificent Newfoundland, a run in the Park; and even Jack, sulky and discontented as he was, could not avoid feeling pleased at his walk. Those who sneer at the Parks have never seen them in all their summer beauty, and as, following "Cæsar's" lead, Jack strolled along the Serpentine, he called himself a fool for never having come out before.

Presently arriving in Kensington Gardens Jack turned off to the left, wandering among the trees. It was a really lovely evening and cool too after the heat of the day, and the weary man was presently not sorry to avail himself of a vacant seat, where he remained for some time pursuing the same train of thought, and wondering how it was all going to end.

He must have been seated there some ten minutes or more when a loud bark from "Cæsar," followed by the cry of a small child, claimed his attention.

Castling a glance in the direction from which the cry came, he quickly realised that something was amiss. For what he saw was a group of three. In the foreground was "Cæsar" with his head bent down, barking at a very small child who was sitting crying on the grass. Behind was a girl or woman, he could not at once decide which, in a very pronounced attitude of alarm.

He at once realised what had happened and what was the present situation. The child had been playing with the dog and had either fallen or been stumbled over; the child was hurt, therefore it cried. "Cæsar" wanted to continue the romp, therefore he barked; and the girl was afraid of the dog, she therefore stood on one side instead of assisting and soothing the youngster.

It was all very simple; but Jack knew that there was nothing amiss, also that people were sometimes frightened by his favourite's size and appearance, in spite of the fact that "Cæsar" was the gentlest of giants. However, he clearly saw he must go to the rescue at once.

"Come to heel, Cæsar!" he cried, as he walked towards the group. Then he touched his hat. "I am afraid my dog has frightened you."

"Not at all, that is, I was alarmed for Kitty," and the girl, emboldened by the presence and restraining influence of "Cæsar's" owner, picked up her small charge and began to comfort her.

"What is the matter, Kitty?" she asked, soothingly.

"Oh, I runned and the dog runned, and then I frowed the ball and the dog runned after it, and he fetched it and put it down, and when I began to frow it again, he knocked me and I fell down," was the breathless and fearful answer.

"Did he hurt you, darling?"

"Oh, no, he didn't hurt me, but I was

frightened and I 'spected he was going to knock me again."

"Naughty dog, you must not play with him any more."

"Oh, he's a nice doggie, but he is so big," and the child waved her hand which still held the ball.

This nearly caused a second catastrophe, for "Cæsar" seeing the prize hanging before his very nose made a jump at it again. The girl gave a scream, but Kitty only laughed.

"Lie down, you brute, will you," said Jack, angrily, hitting at "Cæsar," who unable to understand his fault, retired to a safe distance and sat down in disgust. "I am really very sorry."

"It was Kitty's fault," said the girl, "or mine for not looking after her."

"I will see it does not occur again," said Jack, shaking his stick at the delinquent, who pricked his ears and wondered what was wrong. "I am very sorry you have been annoyed."

"Oh, it really does not matter. Come, Kitty, we must be going. Good-night, and thank you."

And with a little bow the girl returned to the seat she had left at the child's cry, picked up the book she was reading, and led her small charge away.

"Good-night, doggie," said Kitty, as she walked off.

Jack again raised his hat as the girl walked off and looked wistfully after her. It was an attractive little figure, beyond a doubt, in the simple yet tasty cotton print dress and the broad black hat. A pretty little round face, with a small mouth whose ruddy lips looked tempting; and then the dark eyes which shot dangerous glances from under the long lashes! the beautiful auburn hair!—real auburn without a suggestion of red in it. Jack thought to himself what a pretty girl she was.

"Cæsar" looked sadly after the child. He was a good-natured dog, fond of children and romping, and perhaps in his own mind was trying to puzzle out what he had done wrong. Jack's eye fell on him, and he called his old friend and patted him, and so relieved "Cæsar," and sent him galloping on ahead in a very contented frame of mind.

Jack Carstairs looked at his watch and saw it was far too late to think of dinner. The long day was drawing to a close, and he turned his head homewards, and having left "Cæsar" at his rooms, sallied out in search of supper. That important duty concluded, he lit a cigar and strolled home through the streets, crowded now with people. But all the time he was thinking pleasantly of his little adventure; and when at a comparatively early hour he turned into bed, he thought little of the woman he had promised to marry. His thoughts were running on a girl with a big black hat.

The next day he was on guard, and occupied the afternoon in writing a long letter to Marion, in which he drew a harrowing picture of the emptiness of town and his own loneliness, but forgot to mention the little adventure which had befallen him in Kensington gardens.

The following afternoon he got slightly towards five o'clock, and thought several times of giving "Cæsar" another run in the Park. He had grown wonderfully solicitous of his dog's welfare these last few days. However, as he was under a promise to dine with a chum who was passing through London, and go on to the theatre, he decided not to risk being late.

The fourth day his feelings were altogether too much for him, and he put on his hat towards evening and bade "Cæsar" accompany him. He actually started by strolling in the opposite direction to Kensington Gardens, but somehow or other his feet, chance, or the dog took him to the very spot where he had been three days before.

As he drew near the place he looked rather eagerly round to see if it was occupied. To his great disgust it was not. However, as he

was a good deal earlier than on the former occasion, he decided to sit down and wait.

Fully half an hour passed, and not a soul, except a dirty old man, and a middle-aged lady who spread a pleasant perfume of gin around, came near him, and he almost decided to stroll home, when a small voice he recognised cried joyfully, just behind his chair,—

"Oh, Maude, there's my doggie."

"César" heard the voice, too, and trotted up to the small child and looked mournfully at her. He was a sensible dog. He wanted to play, but he was not quite sure how his master might take it.

Jack decided to pretend he saw and heard nothing. He had his reward when, after a whispered conference, the child came close to him and said shyly,—

"Please may your dog play with me."

Jack smilingly gave his assent. Then he rose, and lifting his hat, addressed the girl who had been so constantly in his thoughts for the last three days.

"I see, Miss Kitty is of a forgiving disposition," he said, "she wants to show 'César' she is not afraid of him."

The girl flushed a little, perhaps she hesitated whether she ought to answer.

But Maude Grafton was very young, and Jack was good-looking and respectful, so she decided there could be no harm.

"Kitty has talked of nothing else but your dog since she saw him," was her answer. "She made me come here every night to see if he was here."

"How very innocent the girl is," thought Jack, as he replied,—

"Then I owe her my thanks for the pleasure of this meeting?"

The girl blushed and looked puzzled. She was, however, a novice both at compliments and flirtation, and though not quite sure if it was all right, she felt afraid to try and keep him as a distance now.

So Kitty played with César, who was on his best behaviour, and the pair woke the echoes with shrill laughter and short barks. And Jack talked to Maude Grafton, and managed to find out a good deal about her—that she lived in Kensington with her aunt, that Kitty was her cousin, and that she herself was an orphan and had no brothers or sisters. And the time passed so pleasantly for both of them, that when at last the falling light warned her that it was time to go home, she jumped up with a little cry of alarm.

"It must be awfully late," she said, "and aunt will be alarmed about Kitty. I must go."

"Do you often come here?" he asked, as he said good-night.

"Oh, yes. It is so quiet and nice." And Jack smiled to himself.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THAT second meeting in the Park was but the prelude of many others. In fact, it became almost the daily rule for Jack to wander down as soon as the heat began to lessen, and there fled in the same spot pretty little Maude Grafton and her small charge.

"César," of course, kept him company, and did his duty in amusing the child, who romped about with him till she was almost too tired to walk home. And while dog and child played about among the trees, Jack sat on the seat and talked to Maude, and so the time passed pleasantly enough.

So August passed and September arrived, and, though the rain held off, Jack was no more heard complaining of the heat of the weather, and laughed merrily when others talked of the boredom of remaining in town when they ought to be among the partridges.

He grew so cheery and so happy that all who saw him were surprised, and questioned if this could really be the morose, self-contained young fellow of the previous season.

Yes, Jack was changed, very greatly changed, so much so that he surprised even

himself, and the reason was simple: he had found happiness and an occupation.

If anyone had prophesied a year before that he could take a delight in a girl of Maude Grafton's type, he would have laughed them to scorn, and yet here he undoubtedly was absolutely relling in the friendship which chance had carved out for him.

The girl was so sweet and fresh, so innocent of the deceptions, the coquetties of the world among which he had lived all his thinking life, that the very contrast in itself had for him an inexpressible charm.

As for Maude herself, she was truly in the Seventh Heaven. She never took the trouble to ask who or what Jack was; she only knew he was himself, and that satisfied her.

Her father had been a poor country doctor, her mother a clergyman's daughter, and when first one and then the other died, they left her little but an honourable name and her gentle bringing up.

She had always been educated at home by her mother while she lived, and had been tenderly nurtured amid all the good influences of a lady's home, and when, at her father's death, she came to live with his sister, she was old enough to have profited by the precept and example of her parents.

But of the outer world she knew nothing, she lived in a little circle of her own, happy enough in her way, but ignorant of the sin, the struggles, and the misery which surrounded her on every side.

Her belief in Jack's goodness and cleverness often made that somewhat thoughtless young fellow blush. But it did good too. It actually made his careless nature try to improve itself, so that he presented the unusual spectacle of a thorough worldling growing into a thoughtful member of society, simply through the influence of an innocent, trusting nature.

Yes, they were happy days for both, days when the sun shone and when the brightness of nature seemed reflected in their hearts, days when acquaintance ripened to intimacy, and intimacy to love, and when the innocent girl hoped for nothing better than to win the regard of the handsome young fellow who was in her eyes a very knight-errant, and when the *blasé* man of society grew tender and thoughtful again as he saw expanding before him a nature so much finer and better than his own.

In this way the days went on till nearly a month had sped since the day that "César" upset little Kitty on the grass, and for the time being both had been lulled into a sense of security by their long freedom from interruption. Indeed, who was to interfere?

Lady Lindsey was in Yorkshire, and Maude's aunt never ventured out of doors except to shop. Of course little Kitty had been a source of danger, but Maude's instinct had led her to the first deception of her life.

She told the child not to talk to her mother about the dog, or she would perhaps be forbidden to play with it; and Kitty, whose mother in truth was very unsympathetic with her children, readily promised to do as she was told. She stood in such awe of her mother that she quickly seized the idea and acted on it.

Of course, the deception was wrong, and was the first step in the long course of troubles which followed. Maude herself grieved over it in secret, but what was she to do? To tell the truth means to give up meeting Jack, and that was too awful to think of.

But, of course, everything must have an end—even deception and love. And within a very short time each of the pair of lovers—for though they would have been the last to admit it, this was what they had become—received a reminder that people cannot have things their own way.

Jack's came in the shape of a letter from Lady Lindsey. Marion wrote in terms of greater asperity than she had ever attempted before—and she had good cause.

Jack, in his new-found occupation and amusement, with his usual carelessness,

entirely forgot the woman who was his intended wife; and, when after a fortnight's neglect, Marion wrote, upbraiding him in no measured terms for his neglect, and, on the plea that only illness could explain his conduct, threatened to come up to town at once, he was like a man who wakes from a pleasant dream to the stern realities of unpleasant surroundings.

Sitting down, he dashed off a letter, couched in the warmest of terms, which, by at once blaming and excusing himself, made the poor woman happier than for many a long day past.

But the letter had done its work. It had opened his eyes to the realities of his situation. He knew now that he had outlived his fancy for Marion Lindsey, whom he was bound to marry, and that he was madly, hopelessly infatuated with Maude Grafton, whom it was his duty to forget.

For three whole days he fought with his own weakness. He told himself that he could not give up the comforts of his present existence to face the genteel poverty of a marriage with the girl he loved.

He confessed his honour bade him fulfil his promise to Marion; that he must never see Maude Grafton again.

Interest and honour alike pointed to this course, and so at last he was fully decided never to see poor Maude again. Then, little by little he persuaded himself it was his duty just to say "good-bye," and all hollow-eyed and weary with his mental struggle he bled him to the Park, to find the pretty flower he loved so well had faded and drooped full as much as he had himself.

Poor little Maude! The awakening had come to her as well as to her lover. It is said that when three people are in a secret it can by no human possibility be kept, and in their secret one of the three was a child.

Indeed, it was through Kitty that the secret leaked out. The child made a chance allusion to "César." Her mother, who happened not to be in the clouds, pounced upon it, and in the course of half an hour had sent Kitty to bed inconsolable, and had drawn from Maude a full confession of her almost daily meetings with the fascinating stranger.

The good woman's wrath and indignation were extreme, and she succeeded in thoroughly frightening her niece, and persuading her that she must never see Jack Carstairs again.

Poor Maude, by a superhuman effort, succeeded in keeping away for three whole days. The fourth was too much, and so it happened that as Jack Carstairs was marooning upon Kensington Gardens from one side to tell her he was going away for ever, Maude Grafton was hurrying along with Kitty from the other to bid her hero an eternal farewell. She could trust Kitty now; the child knew that only by chance she could see her dear doggie again.

When the two young people caught sight of each other it would be hard to say which was the most surprised and alarmed.

"My dear girl, what is the matter?"

"Jack, what has happened to you?" came simultaneously from them, neither noticing the warmth of the other.

Then, after a pause, they looked into each other's eyes and incontinently rushed into each other's arms.

The call of honour, duty, common sense, prudence were all scattered to the four winds; and as the child and "César" played, unconscious of what was going on so near them, the happy lovers confessed to each other in whispered tones the love they had come prepared to deny.

"Jack, dear, I could not keep away," sighed Maude, as she nestled contentedly in her lover's arm, when presently a lull occurred in their carousing.

"Not keep away?" said Jack, in some surprise as he thought how he, too, had been an absentee. "Why, child, what do you mean?"

She told him, and as when she came to the



part when she confessed to having decided to give him up for ever she clung tighter to her recovered love, Jack's heart went out to her in real earnest, and he felt that here was a treasure of which any man might be proud. It ashamed him, too, that while she told her artless story, and laid her loving little soul bare before him, he was in no position to reciprocate her confidence, or even to confess that he, too, had been an absentee whose return on that particular evening was more a chance than hers.

"But I was not afraid of you, Jack," she said, confidently, hanging over his name with a hesitation, which made her rendering of it doubly sweet to him. "I knew you would not harm me, dear, would you?"

"Harm you?" he said, in astonishment, "what put such an idea into your foolish little head?"

"Aunt Mary said that only harm could come of our friendship," was her answer. "But I could not understand what she meant?"

But Jack could understand, and it came home to him with its full force, that commonplace saying of a commonplace woman. He knew the harm she meant, the havoc which the friendship of one such as he could work in the tender heart of a girl like Maude. He saw the whole story at a glance: the man who was amusing himself, the girl who was in earnest, the man who rode away unscathed to return to his own people, the tender heart left behind to mourn, and perhaps never quite recover from the desertion of the man she loved.

Something like a prayer rose in his worldly heart at that moment that he at least might be guilty of no such atrocity; and with a determination to be honest and true, he answered the confiding girl who nestled in his arms.

"Your aunt was right," he said, gravely, "but she did not know me. My darling, you have grown into my heart till I feel I cannot live without you, and I came to-day because without you I was miserable, by your side I was content."

Maude could not quite understand all he meant, but she realised one thing—he loved her, and that was enough. She, too, could not bear a separation, and she told him so.

"But what are we to do?" she asked. "Aunt Mary has forbidden me to see you."

He laughed outright.

"What need we care for her?" he said. "You are not bound to her. True she has given you a home, but in a very short time she will be reconciled to your loss. Once we are married, you will find her quite delighted."

The plunge was taken, the fatal word was spoken, he had burnt his boats almost without knowing it, and now he—Jack Carstairs, who had set out to tell the girl that they must part for ever stood committed to marry her.

"Married?" she said, happily; "then may I tell her we are to be married—may I, Jack?"

Jack did not reply; this was the last thing that he meant. He fully intended to marry Maude, but at present there were difficulties in the way. His brow grew clouded as he thought of Marion Lindsey and of the great world in which he lived.

His hesitation did not escape the girl, and she, too, grew alarmed when she saw that he did not answer.

"Am I not to tell Aunt Mary?" she asked, in a low voice.

"I think you had better not;" then with a sudden inspiration he added, "Maude, why should we not make a runaway match of it? You see, your aunt does not like me, and might be nasty; so might my own people—one's family always have a horror of people they know nothing about—and after we are married no one can say a word. What do you think?"

"I don't know," she said, sadly. "Jack, my darling, let things be as you wish. I trust to you."

And with a mental vow that her innocent trust should not be displaced, Jack set to work to argue with her that a private marriage was their wisest course, and so well did he succeed that he sent the girl away quite happy in the assurance that she was going to do a very proper and romantic thing, and when at last they bade each other "good-night," it was only on the full understanding that when next they met it was to part no more.

## CHAPTER V.

ONCE his mind was made up Jack lost no time in carrying his intentions into effect, and very soon after this interview in Kensington Gardens John Carstairs was married by licence to Maude Grafton at a quiet church in the north of London. Maude raised no objections to anything that he proposed, and on the appointed day she quietly left her aunt's house, accompanied by one of the servants who was to act as her witness, and meeting Jack at the church, was married to him with as much expedition as a young curate who had a luncheon engagement could put into the ceremony.

Yet, even he, careless as he was, and accustomed to these unceremonious weddings, wondered a little who these two people could be, the man so obviously one of the wealthy classes, the cut of his clothes betraying a West end tailor, and his air showing that he was used to good society, while the timid, humbly dressed girl, despite her beauty, was undoubtedly of a very different calibre. But it was no business of his, and he played his part and went his way, and presently Jack Carstairs, slipping a sovereign into the astonished vergers' hand, stepped out into the street with his wife on his arm.

His wife—yes it was true, and it struck him then as the sun shone out in its full brilliancy, what a pretty woman it was that he had married. When she had had time to dress herself properly, and had felt her way in the society in which in future she must move, he thought she would hold her own with the best of them.

Maude of course was in the Seventh Heaven. She could hardly realize her good fortune. Here was she, who one brief month ago had never dreamt of such things, the wife of the handsomest, the best, the dearest of men. She looked so happy that one or two passers by guessed her secret as she sailed down the street on her husband's arm, followed by the servant, in search of a hansom which was to carry them off to Hampton Court, where they were to spend the rest of the day.

Yet there comes a moment of sadness to every woman on this the happiest day of her life, the moment when she throws off her last connection with home. And Maude felt it a little as she watched her husband give the servant a handsome present, and a note in which she told of her marriage, and asked that the box she had left ready packed might be sent to an address her husband gave.

Then Jack hailed a hansom, and they drove off to Waterloo and went down by train and had lunch at a hotel, and then hired a boat, and Jack sculled her a long way up the river. It was the happiest day she had spent in her life.

It was late in the afternoon when Jack and she reached their future home—bright, cheery rooms, which he had taken for her in Fulham, where he hoped to be able to spend most of his time off duty. And here was a pleasant, kindly landlady waiting, and her box, which the servant, under the stimulus of Jack's "tip," had left for her herself. And then came dinner and a pleasant evening, and the long happy day ended as it had begun, without a cloud.

Jack had not given up his rooms in St. James's. He never knew when he might require to use them, and, besides, his doing so would at once be a reason for suspicion; but

he moved most of his things to 19, Courtney-road, and there he and his wife spent a happy honeymoon together—Jack carrying on his duties as required and returning every time with fresh appreciation to the dear little wife whose every action showed her ever-increasing love.

So the time went on, till the days began to shorten and autumn changed to winter, and the informal season before Christmas began. Then Jack's difficulties set in (as if he had not enough already) and he actually had at times to take leave to keep out of the way. People began to talk about his strange behaviour, never appearing in society, and some to rally him about it. Jack winced a bit. It was easy to put off Maude by saying that his people had not come to see her because they were abroad, but it was harder to furnish excuses to his hospitably-inclined friends.

As for Marion Lindsey, he never even dared to think of her. He had never announced his marriage to the world, that was his affair, but he had not even told Marion that all must be at an end between them. He had simply lived up to the deception he was carrying on by never reading her letters, and occasionally, very occasionally, writing to her.

But this state of things could not last for ever, as Jack fully realized. He knew that, so far as Maude was concerned, there would be little trouble, his wife had seen nothing of society, never mixed in the great world, and to her the life they were leading was at least as lively as the days when she had to act as nursery governess to Kitty, and it had the additional charm of his own society to relieve it; but in a few weeks, almost a few days, Marion Lindsey would be in town, and then there must be an explanation.

Then there was another trouble—funds were getting low, and he would soon have to draw in his horns. Just at present the chance of his making a rich marriage was keeping his duns quiet, but that would not last for ever. And, like a fool, he had in the first exuberance of his love exhausted his funds and pledged his credit in heaping Maude with clothes and jewellery the girl did not really want or care about.

She always chose the plainest dresses to wear, and the old box she had brought with her, in spite of her husband's protests, stood shabby and worn out beside the gorgeous new trunk he had bought her. It was hardly unpacked, and stood as she brought it, in case, as she once told her husband fondly, "he ever got tired of her," and all he could say could not persuade her to move it, till at last he grew accustomed to its presence.

Then another thing began to trouble him sadly. Every morning he had to get up an hour earlier than his wont, snatch a breakfast as best he could, and hurry off to his rooms from which it was his habit to sail forth, dressed for duty as usual, just as if he lived there. So long as the fine weather lasted it did not matter much, but when the damp autumn mornings set in, and economy drove him into a musty omnibus, he really began to object and to regard himself somewhat in the light of a martyr.

His wife and her landlady both thought his absences very natural, for though he never told her what his occupation was, Maude had a general notion that men's business took them away during the greater part of the day, and the landlady considered that his long day's work argued him to be an exceedingly steady-going young clerk in the city, for such she supposed him to be.

Accidents will happen in the best regulated families, and when one morning Jack came down very late, to find his breakfast half cooked and the tea made with lukewarm water, he entirely failed to grasp the situation.

His previous experiences had led him to overlook the fact that as the mornings grow darker servants are apt to oversleep themselves, and for the first time in his married life lost his temper.

His wife, who had never seen him this way before, tried humbly to coax him back into a good temper, but in vain; and after a very sulky imitation of the warm kiss he generally gave her on parting, she retired in tears to her bedroom to sob out her grief in solitary discomfort.

Meanwhile Jack, a little ashamed of himself, was wending his way towards the West-end. The morning was a typical November one, with a thick white mist draping everything, and as he proceeded his ill-humour increased; the climax came when he was driven inside an overcrowded bus full of damp humanity, and by the time he reached his rooms he felt inclined to vent his spleen on anything.

His morning's correspondence was hardly calculated to improve his feelings. A couple of "duns" and a letter in Marion Lindsey's handwriting were hardly what he would have chosen. Tossing the two former aside, he quickly opened Lady Lindsey's letter and found it to be a note saying she had returned to town, and would be glad to see him that afternoon about ten time.

#### CHAPTER VI.

MARION'S letter gave Mr. Carstairs something to think about during his morning's duties. Indeed, it was not until after his luncheon at the club that he could quite determine what to do.

Of course he must see her. There was no way out of that, and equally he must close their engagement—how, chance would have to determine, provided only his marriage could be kept in the background. And in this frame of mind he set out for Lady Lindsey's house, and, arriving, was shown into the drawing room.

It was some minutes before Marion came in; and as he sat awaiting her arrival the well-remembered scene of some months before came vividly back, the scene when he was asking her to be his wife. And then, as he tried to persuade himself that the manly, straightforward course was the best, irresistibly the influence of his surroundings—so great a contrast to his new home—began to gain upon him, and then, almost before he knew of her coming, Marion was in the room, and impelled by something more than force of habit he had taken her in his arms as of old. Certainly it was not force of habit which left her nestling there contentedly, little dreaming that she was trespassing on another's rights, nor was it force of habit which made her in that instant forget her sufferings from Jack's own neglect.

Weakness again! Jack meant no harm, and, beautiful as Marion stood before him, he never for an instant wavered in his faith to his wife. But he was taken by surprise, and had never in all his carefully thought-out plans for breaking with Lady Lindsey kept in sight the fact that she was still his promised wife, and he only a man who had raised a mighty barrier between them. The situation was not of his making, and, with a mental reproach for his own weakness, he vowed it should not be repeated so far as he was concerned.

"Jack dear," said Marion. "How well you are looking."

"I could say the same for you," he answered, gently disengaging himself from her embrace, and leading her to a settee. "Your holiday has done you good."

"You naughty boy," she said, reproachfully. "I could not rest for a minute after I returned till I had seen you. I could never hear a word of you from anyone, and your own letters said so little that I could not make out if you were ill or not. I have been quite anxious."

"I never was a good correspondent," said Jack, hastily. "I always found it hard to write. But tell me, what have you been doing all the time?"

"Did not you ever read my letters?" she asked in surprise. "I often thought you did not, you left so many questions unanswered." "Oh! of course. I know where you went and all that sort of thing; but I want to hear all the rest!—who, said what, and so on."

It was a blundering sort of speech, and yet it served its purpose, for it started Marion chatting about her autumn visits, while Jack sat paying but scant attention to what she said, and trying to catch an opportunity for delivering himself of his message. But that chance never came; and Jack sat on, outgelling his brains what to say, and never quite finding the right expression. No wonder his heart failed him in face of the great affection which Marion showed him, and that he hesitated to deal the fatal blow he really wanted to deal her.

It was nearly seven when he jumped up again. "I had no idea it was so late," he said. "I must be off."

"What!" she answered in a tone of the greatest disappointment. "Are you going away to night, the very first day I am home? Can't you stop to dinner, Jack?"

"No—not so night. I have promised to dine elsewhere. Be reasonable, Marion," as she showed signs of rebellion. "Remember you gave me no notice."

"Very well," she said in a low voice, and rang the bell for a servant to show him out.

There was an awkward pause while she stood looking sadly into the fire, and he was wondering if by some unseen agency, he could get away without a second embrace.

Presently she turned to him again.

"If it had been your return, Jack," she said, "I would have thrown over anybody. Tell me, dear, do you really care for me?"

"Care for you, Marion?" he stammered. "What do you mean?"

"Why, I sometimes think you don't," she said sadly. "You don't always treat me as if you did. Look at this long autumn; while I have written you hundreds of pages, what mere scraps, and how few and far between, you have deigned to send me."

"That," he said, stubbornly, "was your own wish and by your own orders. Was it not?"

"Yes and no," she answered, looking down into the fire. "I certainly told you that as our engagement had not as yet been announced, you must be careful not to write many letters to one house. But I thought, I hoped, that what I did receive might be the reflection of the affection that I bore for you. But perhaps I have been deceived. I know, Jack, I am older, far older than you, and that I ought not to tie you. Listen to me. If in any way your feelings have changed since you asked me in this very room to be your wife—say so. It is far better for us both, to end it now, before worse mischief is done. No one knows our story. We can keep it to ourselves, and I, at least, can always be your friend. Shall it be so?"

If ever a man felt troubled, if ever a man felt contrite in this world, it was Jack Carstairs; but he knew the moment had come, and raising his eyes to hers (for she had turned to face him) he answered as he should.

"You are right. Many a time since we made that promise, Marion, I have thought we were heavy. I should have said, so before, but I could not for the life of me forfeit your friendship. If I may keep that, I shall feel that the dream of the past has not been altogether barren of results."

As he spoke, the footman, who thought from the lapse of time he must have mistaken the reason for her bell, knocked at the door. Marion bade him come in, and then held out her hand to Jack.

"As you wish. It is better so. Good-night, Mr. Carstairs."

He wrung her hand and turned to go. But barely had the door closed behind him, when the stricken woman's fortune gave way, and she was sobbing out her lonely grief as she knelt before the fire.

#### CHAPTER VII.

JACK CARSTAIRS heaved a sigh of relief as he gained the street and hailed a passing hansom. He could not help contrasting his position now with what it had been six months before, and he was at first a little inclined to congratulate himself on his extrication from his principal difficulty.

But, after all, was he out of his troubles? True, his engagement to Lady Lindsey was at an end; but though at present he was in a position to hold his head erect, how would it be when he confessed to his marriage?

Then the first question would be, how came he to have remained under a promise to Marion fully three months after he was married to Maude? However, with a shrug of the shoulders he dismissed his thoughts, and set himself to enjoy the present.

His poor little wife, who had spent a miserable day wondering if he would come back as ill-tempered as he went away, was delighted to find her fears groundless.

Jack, glad of his escape, was in the best possible spirits and temper. Never had he been so gay and cheery, and generally inclined to look at things from the best possible light, and for almost the first time Jack went to bed free of care.

But unfortunately his happy humour did not last. The next day was again wet, and Jack had again to try the inside of a crowded bus. The ride reminded him of all that he had given up, and his day's work at the West-end sent him back to his home a soured and sulky man.

Poor Maude tried her best to coax him back into a good humour, but altogether failed. The novelty of his married life was wearing off, and his selfish nature was getting the upper hand.

So long as Lady Lindsey had appeared beyond his reach he had loved her madly, and had left no stone unturned to win her. Once she had promised to be his wife, he had ceased to value her.

It was just the same with the unfortunate girl he had made his wife, not because he really loved her, but to gratify a passing caprice.

Marion Lindsey, sorrowing in secret, had little suspicion of the truth. Had she known it, perhaps she would have realised that the man, who had at one time been all in all to her, was utterly unworthy of her regard, and would have been glad of her escape.

Poor Maude Carstairs was finding out something now. She had arrived at that period in her married life when so often the mad affection of courtship and of the honeymoon begin to cool, and when it has to be replaced either by the steadfast love and mutual regard which makes a happy home, or by the regret and cool indifference which too often ends in strong aversion.

Her own love never wavered. It is often so. The man goes his way fretting and fuming at the log which he has tied round his neck; the woman weeps out her sorrow in the silent solitude of their deserted home.

And Jack Carstairs was cursing his folly a thousand times a day. Oursing the stupidity which led him to stake everything on a pretty face, forgetful of the realities of life.

Maude, with all her innocent beauty and her sweet nature, was not of his own set, and here lay the stumbling-block. Of course, his marriage, his folly, was a secret from every one; but the very exigencies of his position prevented his doing successfully what he tried to do—namely, preserve an outward semblance of what was due to his wife, while in reality he lived the old life of bachelor freedom as if no such person existed.

The winter season was commencing, and so popular a man as Jack was in great request, and invitations showered upon him which he had neither the inclination nor the force of will to decline. Thus it came to pass that his wife saw less and less of him, and that he was



sometimes, absent for two or three days together.

What Maude suffered he neither knew, nor cared. But though he overlooked the change, or was too careless to notice it, there was one person in the house who did not, and whose feelings at last got the better of her and forced her to speak out.

So long as Jack's absences were confined to the day-time with a very occasional all-night stay his landlady, Mrs. Watson, never troubled herself. She thought it was all right and proper.

Business gentlemen had duties to perform, and such was what she had long ago decided Jack to be.

He was a clerk in the city, a clerk of the better sort, of course, probably related to a principal in the house he belonged to, and drawing a good salary with a view to his eventually becoming a partner.

The fact that he had now and again to be absent from home spoke well for the estimation in which he was held by the heads of the house; he was doubtless entrusted with some important business which took him out of town.

But as the winter wore on, and the absences became longer and more frequent, the worthy women began to wonder what it all meant, and when she saw plainly the troubled spirit which Maude tried so hard to conceal, she felt there was something wrong, and that she must watch, and if necessary give the young wife a kindly hint. She began to fear that her lodgers were quarrelling.

She had not long to wait for an opportunity. One evening at dusk, going upstairs with a cup of afternoon tea, she found Maude with her face covered by her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"My dear," said the kind-hearted woman, "what is the matter?"

But as she spoke her eye fell upon a slip of pink paper which lay on the table. She spoke in the situation at a glance. Jack had as usual telegraphed to say that he should not be home that night.

"Oh, it is nothing, really it is not, Mrs. Watson," answered Maude, showing her tear-stained face. "Please leave me alone, I shall be all right in a little."

The kind woman put her arm round the girl and led her, unresisting, to a sofa.

"My dear," she said, in a sympathetic voice, "this won't do, it really will not. You must tell me what it is. You've no mother of your own, so you must let me help you. Come, what has troubled you to-night?"

Maude's only answer was to sob louder than ever. Mrs. Watson let her give vent to her grief; good, kind-hearted woman that she was, she determined to soothe the girl if it was possible to do so.

After a while she spoke again.

"Now, my dear," she said, "tell me all about it."

It was impossible for the lonely girl to avoid feeling grateful for her sympathy. She did not want to expose her husband's shortcomings, but she longed for someone whose advice she could take.

"I am upset to night, Mrs. Watson," she said.

"Well, what troubles you?"

"My husband has telegraphed to say he can't come home to-night."

"Well, well, is that all? It has happened before. I suppose that his business keeps him away."

She spoke with a confidence she did not really feel.

"I don't know, I'm sure," sobbed Maude. "But he seems to be always away."

"Well, what is his business?" asked the landlady, not altogether without the hope of justifying her own curiosity.

"I cannot say; he never told me."

"Never told his own wife what his business was!" gasped Mrs. Watson. "My dear, you are joking."

"No, indeed, I am not. I mean occasionally."

Jack only said he should always have to be away by day, and now and again all night. But he never told me what he was or why he had to go."

"Then," said Mrs. Watson, emphatically, "I should not wait one minute when he comes back before I asked him, if I were you. I never heard of such a thing."

And then, as they continued to talk, Maude gradually unfolded her trouble, and told of Jack's increasing coldness, and frequent and unexplained absences. Mrs. Watson's indignation was genuine enough, and she made no effort to conceal it, and she impressed upon the girl the absolute necessity of her insisting on Jack giving her his confidence. And she also determined in her own mind that Jack should treat his wife better or get a few words on the subject from herself.

But when on his return Maude pressed for an explanation, Jack at first grew black, and then laughed the matter off. But for a day or two he behaved so well that even Mrs. Watson thought that he meant to mend his ways, and hearing from Maude of his refusal to explain his profession in life, nevertheless determined to keep her own little passage of arms with him in the background for the present.

But Jack's good behaviour did not last long. He had actually tried to amend his ways himself, and got so far as to bring his dress clothes back with him and leave them there so as to avoid temptation. But his weak nature was too much for him. There was to be a dance given by some intimate friends for which he had a card. He almost decided to refuse; then gave way, and actually returned home, dressed himself for the evening, told his wife not to stir up for him, and, loathly in pocket, took himself off without a word of explanation, though his wife with tears in her eyes begged him to tell her why and where he was going.

But, all the same, she had gone once too often.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MAUDE'S first impulse was to sit down and have a good cry. Then she felt all at once that matters had gone beyond that. Rising quickly, she dried her eyes, and went upstairs to Jack's dressing-room.

The proverb says a worm will turn, and so in time will a gentle patient woman. Maude Carstairs had roused herself at last, and had taken a desperate resolve: she would, if possible, fathom for herself this mystery which her husband refused to explain.

She went into the room, lit the gas, and looked both doors.

As she did so, Mrs. Watson, who had heard Jack go out, and had some upstairs to find out what it meant, knocked at the door.

Maude answered her. She asked if anything was the matter. Maude replied "no," with a laugh—she was only sidging Jack's room; and Mrs. Watson, reassured, went away.

"Tidying Jack's room," she thought, with a feeling of bitterness beyond words gnawing at her heart.

"Tidying Jack's room!" as with a laugh she tossed aside after article on to the floor, without much rewarding her search.

There were a few things which might have told her much if she had been more experienced. Outshining colours, a faded button-hole, or a rolled pair of white kid gloves. But she wanted more than that; and search where she would, she could not find it.

With a feeling of despair she began to think Jack had been too careful for her. He very nearly had, but he had missed one small point, and that betrayed him.

Maude was on the point of giving up the search when her eye fell upon the coat he had worn that afternoon, and a moment later what she sought was in her hands. It was not much, only an envelope addressed to him by name and regiment at his club, and for the first time since their marriage Maude knew

whom she had taken for better or, as she felt just then, very much for worse.

She drew out the card that it contained and read that Lady Brookenshire was "at home" that night.

Maude replaced the card in its envelope, and sat down on a chair to think. She did not waste much time. It was fairly late, and she wanted to see as much as possible.

It was wonderful how calm and collected she had become. She walked into the next room, and selecting her warmest dress and a thick fur-cloak Jack had given her, she quietly prepared to go out. Then she walked downstairs to their sitting room, and rang the bell.

"I am just going up the street to meet my husband. He had to go out and asked me to meet him," was all that she said.

Mrs. Watson looked doubtfully at her, but she did not like to say anything.

"Shall you be out long, Mrs. Carstairs?" she asked, nervously.

"Not very. What a cold night!" and Maude passed into the street.

When five minutes later Mrs. Watson looked in to see the effect of Maude's "tidying" on her husband's room she nearly had a fit. Then she ran down into the street, and looked for her lodger, who had disappeared some time before.

But all the same Maude was not very far off. She was waiting on a main thoroughfare for a 'box, which would take her to Piccadilly. When it came, she did not know it was the same which took her husband daily to his duties.

Her first proceeding had been to go to a small stationer's where she was known, and ask for the loan of a directory. The *Court Guide* was handed to her, and she soon found Lord Brookenshire's address in it, and thither she was bound.

Little as she knew of London she soon found her way to the house, and there she waited and watched.

She looked in vain for her husband, for the majority of the guests had arrived, and Jack among them; but ever and again a splendidly appointed carriage would draw up at the door and deposit its load of revellers. And then Maude saw by the light of the gas the brilliant dresses and sparkling jewels of the women for whose society her husband had deserted her.

Hour after hour the enraged wife paced up and down before the house, looking up at the windows and listening to the strains of the music.

She stayed so long that at last a policeman on duty asked her what her business was. She answered she was waiting for her husband. He thought she must mean one of the waiters, though she looked too well dressed for that. However, she did not look suspicious, so he let her stay.

Let her stay! She would have yielded to nothing short of force had they tried to remove her. She was there with an object. She meant to stay and expose her husband, or at all events to face him, and to let him know that she knew the truth at last.

Hour after hour passed; but, heedless alike of the cold and of the curiosity of the few loafers who hung about outside, she paced backwards and forwards intent only on her one object—to let her husband know that now at last she had fathomed the depths of his duplicity and neglect.

A sudden noise recalled her to the world—carriage after carriage drove up in response to the calls, and took away the portion of the guests who left after supper. She watched eagerly, but saw no one she recognised. Then the departures slackened, and only now and again some one was driven away.

A neighbouring clock had just struck half-past two, when her attention was called to yet another departure. The carriage was a little delayed in coming, and the lady, apparently sending back her cavalier for something forgotten, stood waiting at the head of the steps.

Maude saw a tall, handsome woman, exquisitely dressed, and her hair and neck, which she was just covering with her cloak, sparkling with jewels—a beautiful woman indeed, and in appearance a very queen.

In a moment it was over—the carriage drove up, and the lady, taking a gentleman's arm, came forward. Maude breathed hard, for she saw that now at last she would be face to face with her husband.

All unsuspecting, Jack led Lady Lindsey (for it was she) down the steps, and handed her into her carriage. Then as the footman closed the door, Maude sprang forward and caught him by the arm. Her doing so caused him to move so that the door could not be closed.

"Jack," she said, "what are you doing here?"

Before he could answer the policeman was upon her. He began to think he had made a mistake. In any case he could not allow a scene. He laid his hand on Maude's shoulder and drew her back.

"Come," he said, not unkindly, "you must move out of this! I can't have you annoying this gentleman."

"I tell you it is my husband," said Maude, loud enough for Lady Lindsey to overhear.

But Jack Carstairs had recovered his wits. He snatched the door out of the footman's hands, and shut it to.

"All right, Evans," he said. "Good-night, Lady Lindsey. Is it not a charming dance?"

"Good-night," said Marion, and the carriage drove away.

Then Jack turned to his wife.

"All right," he said, slipping half-a-crown into the policeman's hand, "I know this—lady. Come along, Maude, we had better leave this."

The policeman eyed them, wondering, as Jack hailed a hansom, and placing his wife in it, got in after her.

As soon as they were started he turned to her. "So you followed me," he said, coolly. "All right, we can discuss this at home; you had better not make a scene here."

Poor Maude had little idea of making a scene. Her courage was all gone. But one thing was left—her love. Bitterly, cruelly as her husband had deceived her, she would freely have forgiven him and taken him back, if he too would but repent and give her a little of the affection that she felt for him.

But Jack Carstairs had not any idea of doing so. He was livid with rage, alike at her following him and at the idea of the scene he had so narrowly escaped. All the way home he had but one idea—that all must now come to an end.

When they arrived home it was almost three in the morning, yet Mrs. Watson came running out and uttered an exclamation of delight at seeing them both safe and sound.

"My dear," she said, hurrying Maude into the house, "I never was so alarmed in my life. Where have you been?"

"To fetch my husband," was Maude's answer, as she staggered wearily into the sitting-room, and sat down while Mrs. Watson lit the gas. Her husband followed her quickly, merely waiting to say something to the cabman. When the landlady left the room he closed and looked the door.

"Now, madam," he said, standing before her, "you will kindly tell me what all this means."

Maude looked up at him wearily—she hardly knew what to answer.

"Jack," she said, "why have you treated me so?"

"Treated you so!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Why, indeed? I was a fool when I was caught by your pretty face—doubly a fool when I married you—treble a fool now that I have not got rid of you long ago."

He hardly knew what he said in his rage and fury. But Maude had heard enough; she tottered forward and fell on her knees at his feet.

"Oh, Jack, my husband! don't say such cruel things," she cried. "Say you don't

mean them. You could not be so unkind, I know."

"Mean them!" he answered, savagely. "I mean a great deal more. Listen to me, my fine lady. You and I part to-night and for ever. I will see you want for nothing, and you can live on here quite comfortably; but we see no more of each other," and he turned to go.

"Jack! Jack!" she cried in a last appeal. "Don't leave, oh, please don't. I want to tell you something."

"Bosh! I will have nothing to say to you. I am going now. I will send for my things to-morrow."

And he hastily left the house, and jumping into the cab, which he had told to wait, he drove away.

It was late when he awoke the next morning, and with awakening sense came some return of reason. He felt in truth heartily ashamed of his violence and of his behaviour altogether, and was quite at a loss what to do. He knew quite well that he had behaved badly, and that his proposed desertion of his wife was indefensible on every ground. He could not at once decide what to do, but he would go down to Fulham and make his peace with his wife. He knew she would forgive him readily enough.

But it was later than he intended when he reached his home, and it was past one o'clock when he let himself in at the door with his latch-key.

There was an air of confusion about the little sitting-room which he did not quite like. He rang for the landlady.

"Is Mrs. Carstairs in," he asked.

Mrs. Watson's agitation would hardly allow her to answer.

"No, sir. She has gone!"

"Gone! What do you mean?"

"While I was out this morning, she sent for a cab, put her box on it, and was driven away."

Her box—what box? and then a sudden thought struck him. Filled with dismay, he dashed upstairs, and threw open the door of his wife's room, and a pretty sight was there. All the handsome dresses, jewellery, etc., were scattered anyhow about the room. Then, with a dread he dared not think of, he glanced across the room. His fears were just. All that he had given his wife were present, but the old trunk was gone!

## CHAPTER IX.

LADY LINDSEY had seen and heard a good deal more than Jack Carstairs supposed. One half, certainly, of Maude's scheme was successful. Had her husband seen Marion Lindsey fall back in her carriage with an exclamation of surprise, as she drove away, he would have known how successful Maude's effort had proved. It had all passed in a flash, but Lady Lindsey was leaning forward to bid her escort "good-night," and the light under the portico was strong. She had seen Maude come forward, had heard her question, and then seen, too, the policeman's interference, and Jack's eagerness to get her away. But through it all, one thing stood out plain and clear, the woman's answer to the policeman, "I tell you it is my husband." There was not a doubt of that, and as the carriage rolled rapidly along the deserted streets—deserted that is, save for an occasional market-cart on its way to Covent Garden—the haughty beauty lay back and wondered what it meant.

"My husband!" Surely it could not be true. The girl was pretty, she had assured herself of that fact, and quietly and well dressed. But then, what lady—and she laid stress on the word—would have been out in such a place at such an hour? Of course, it might be a case of mistaken identity, but such a thing seemed hardly probable. What could be the truth? Had Jack in a moment of folly married beneath him? As likely as not; but when, and why, and how?

Of course she knew that everything was at an end between herself and her quondam lover. To a great extent she herself was free of her fancy, and was able now not only to look back upon her disappointment without regret, but to meet Jack, when chance threw them together, without any feeling of vindictiveness or pain. Their secret had been well kept, the only person besides themselves who knew it having never even told it to his wife; and though a few noticed that their friendship was not so warm as it used to be, the matter was too trivial and too old to cause much comment. It seemed too improbable that they would ever make a match for any one to discuss it seriously; and though a good many people commented upon their being so much together, the fact was attributed to Lady Lindsey's fancy for the good-looking fellow; and so while the good-natured passed the matter by, the ill-natured dismissed it with a sneer at Marion's infatuation.

Those three or four days of reflection had done Lady Lindsey good. She saw now the folly of her fancy, and she was quite prepared to look back on the past as a foolish dream. Her meeting with Jack was quite accidental, and only just at the end of the ball. She had spoken to him and asked him to help her to her carriage, and had generally treated him so kindly that he felt quite free of awkwardness.

A short time before, his wife's finding him with Lady Lindsey might have led to trouble; now it would only be a passing annoyance.

And yet, as she drove home, Marion guessed a good deal of the truth. She had in her own mind no doubt that Jack was married, and that the pretty girl whom he had been so troubled at meeting was his wife.

It was, in a way, galling to think how he had played with herself, and degrading to think of the deception which he had practised upon her. But there came another and a wiser and kinder thought. The greatest sin of all is the sin of being found out.

This she had escaped; her secret was safe, and now she could only be thankful that her good fortune had stood her in good stead, and that chance had saved her from being a second time tied to a worthless man—for worthless such a man most necessarily was. And if she, with all her experience, had been hoodwinked, what chance had that poor child, whose agonised face she had seen but now? For her she was bitterly sorry.

She passed a tranquil night; and when the next morning, just before lunch time, her cousin was announced, she received him with so frank and affectionate a manner, that she relieved half the awkwardness of the meeting.

For Lord Boldremont had never been to see her since the day when he had spoken his mind so freely, and then been forced to retire before the victorious Jack Carstairs.

"How are you, Marion?" he said, as cheerily as he could. "We have not met for an age. What have you been doing?"

"Visiting," she answered.

And then for a long time they talked over every possible subject but the one which was really uppermost in their thoughts.

Lord Boldremont hardly cared to re-open the subject, and though Marion was anxious to tell him, she too felt a delicacy in saying what she wished.

But in the end she was forced to allude to it. Lord Boldremont had taken up his hat and was preparing to go, when she begged him to stay a few minutes longer.

"Don't go for a few minutes yet, Hugh," she said; "I have something to tell you."

He laid down the hat he had taken up, and reseatting himself, prepared to hear what she had to say.

"I hope, Hugh," she said, nervously, "you have never mentioned to anybody that I engaged to Jack Carstairs."

"No," he answered; "I did not think I ought to break what was, after all, your confidence. I have never mentioned it to a soul—not even to my wife."



"I am glad to hear it. I don't suppose you are likely to tell anybody now. But it would be awkward if you did, as my engagement is broken off."

"My dear Marion, I am delighted" (and, indeed, he looked as if he was), "delighted beyond measure. How did it come about?"

"Easily enough; he tired of me."

"Just what a boy would do," Lord Boldremon answered, with contempt. "However, Marion, you are well out of that. Believe me, there are plenty of better men in the world, and a woman need never want for a husband who has your advantages."

"Thank you," she answered, with a smile; "but I have had enough of men and their ways. I shall not imperil my freedom again."

"Perhaps a wise resolve," he answered, as he rose to go.

Lady Lindsey felt happier after he was gone for having told him, and as the time wore on she felt happier too for her freedom and escape.

As she looked around her she discovered plenty of ways of employing herself without again trying to shipwreck her happiness amid the shoals of matrimony. And as the weeks flew by, and her thoughts turned from her own concerns to the misery which lay around her on every side, she found a new and engrossing occupation, namely, the relief of the necessities of a few of her less favoured neighbours.

She did not in any way become a recluse—on the contrary, she mixed a great deal in society; but she still found time for charitable works, and her beautiful face became known and beloved in many a dirty slum, where such rays of light had seldom penetrated before.

Her chief coadjutor in these matters was a hard-working, middle-aged clergyman, who made it his business to ferret out and lay before her deserving cases.

Mr. Gresson and she became firm allies, and under his wise guidance she was able to dispense her charities both wisely and well.

It was some four or five months after her rupture with Jack Carstairs, that one morning Mr. Gresson called earlier than was his wont, and was at once shown upstairs to Lady Lindsey's drawing-room.

"What is it this morning?" asked Marion.

"Have you anything special for me, Mr. Gresson?"

"Yes, Lady Lindsey. I have come to ask your assistance in a very special case indeed. Perhaps I had better tell you all about it. Some three or four months ago a friend of mine, a doctor at one of our leading hospitals, asked me if I could help a patient of his. He himself had been greatly interested in her case. She was a young and very pretty girl, who had been brought to the hospital one afternoon from Charing Cross Railway Station, where she had been found in a helpless condition. When admitted she was suffering from an attack of brain fever, and for days she lay between life and death. She was spared, but when she came to her senses it was found she had quite lost her memory. Who or what she is no one has been able to discover; and she had nothing but the clothes she wore, some of the articles being marked with the letters C. and M. She recovered in a sort of way, and the doctor asked me to look after her when discharged."

"The girl was taken to our district home, where ever since she has been employed on light work. But unfortunately either the shock to her system or the illness had ruined her constitution, and now she is, I grieve to say, dying. She cannot even do the little work she did before, and I can no longer keep her in the home. By the bye, I forgot to say she wears a wedding ring and talks of a husband, but she does not know his name! However, to cut a long story short, I want to know if you would help us to make the poor creature's last hours as happy and comfortable as you can. My friend will attend to her

health as far as is needed, and all we want is to provide her a humble home."

"Can I see her?" asked Marion.

"Oh, most certainly; whenever you wish."

"I will come now if you will wait while I ring for my carriage."

They drove to Mr. Gresson's home, and Marion was introduced to the girl, who indeed looked in every way as the clergyman had described her. It was too evident that she was dying, indeed, the hand of death had laid his mark upon her, and Lady Lindsey's kind heart went out in pity to the helpless girl who, bereft of an essential part of her reason, was drifting, 'mid all the darkness of her surroundings, down the stream of life towards the ocean whence none may return.

She was very quiet and gentle, and Marion, who had come prepared for an ordinary case, was surprised to find that she had unmistakably to deal with a lady. But more than all other things one point struck her most forcibly—she had seen that face before.

A very few minutes' conversation sufficed for her to make up her mind. Presently she bade the girl "good-bye" and went outside with Mr. Gresson.

"She is a very ladylike girl," she said, "and has been a beauty."

"Undoubtedly," he replied. "There is very little doubt that she is of gentle birth."

A sudden idea struck Marion Lindsey. She was quick to act, and she spoke her mind at once.

"Mr. Gresson," she said, "may I have her?"

"How do you mean?" he answered.

"May I take her away with me now?"

"Thank you, Lady Lindsey, you are most kind. But surely we had better keep her till you arrange some suitable place for her to live."

"Oh, I meant her to live with me. Do you see any objection to her doing so?"

"Not in the least. But really, Lady Lindsey, this far exceeds what I asked. You ought not to undertake so much. I am sure the girl will be a trouble to you."

"No, she won't," said Marion. "I am afraid I am sometimes wilful, Mr. Gresson. I happen to have taken this idea into my head and the girl will go home with me now. Do you know, it is a most curious thing, but I am positive I have seen her before."

"Indeed—where?"

"I cannot say; but I know we have come across each other somewhere. Come, may I take her?"

"Certainly, with pleasure. I only wish the poor girl's memory might return. I should like to clear up several points."

"It may with care and kindness."

"Never," he answered, solemnly. "I much fear never in this world."

So Lady Lindsey carried Maude Carstairs home with her to her house. For it was Maude who was then thrown under her protection—Maude who, flying from her trouble, had succeeded in reaching Charing-cross and there had broken down. In her grief at Jack's desertion she had persuaded herself that he really meant to leave her for ever; and rather than become the pensioner of a husband who had ceased to love her, she had fled to hide herself from him.

At first, under Marion's care and kindness, her health improved, and so did her memory—she remembered her maiden name and her childhood, but later events were a blank. Still Marion did not despair, and even the doctor looked more hopeful, and said, though she would never be strong, she might live for some time yet.

But alas! it was not to be. One day when Marion Lindsey was busy, Maude picked up an old photograph book and came across Jack's likeness in it; and then Lady Lindsey, who was writing at her table, was startled by a cry of "Jack! Husband! Forgive me! Oh, come back!" and found her lying insensible on a sofa with Jack Carstairs' photograph clasped firmly to her heart.

## CHAPTER X.

WHAT Jack Carstairs said in his wrath and grief when he found his wife was gone, is hardly probable that Mrs. Watson ever cared to repeat.

Terribly frightened and grieved as that worthy woman was herself, she still found time to respect the bereaved man's sorrow; for sorrow it was, as genuine as any she had ever seen in her life.

Jack Carstairs was not bad at heart—he was only unutterably selfish; and when at last the consequences of his own misdeeds came crowding upon him he realised what he had done, and bent beneath the blow.

What more horrible position could a man find himself in than that in which he one morning awoke to discover that the woman to cherish and protect whom is at once his duty and his highest honour, has fled, perhaps to obscurity, perhaps to death, and that her frenzied action is the outcome of his own misdeeds? In that bitter half-hour, when in the wreck of his once happy home he stood and reviled everyone and everything near him, the consequences of his own misdeeds came home to him with stunning force, and he knew what a paltry hound he really was.

Then, collecting his energies, he set out to search; but though he employed skilled detectives and advertised and hunted high and low himself, he could discover nothing. One clue, indeed, he had, the old brown box, and that he found at Charing-cross in the lost property office. But there was nothing to connect the box with the poor wandering creature found in the ladies' waiting-room, and the clue failed, and at last he was forced to acknowledge that Maude was gone beyond recall, save only if her love or chance again brought her to his side.

What he suffered in those awful weeks no one ever knew. At the end of them he was a prematurely aged man.

His friends wondered what had come to the formerly careless trifler, the being who, of all others, certainly took things most easily. They little knew the torments he suffered, or how his self-torturing soul quailed at each inquest he read in the papers, or each placard that he saw in the streets.

But it was all in vain, and not a sign could he find of the wife whom too late he was learning to value and to love; and when one day he received a note from Lady Lindsey asking him to come with all speed to the house, and going down below found her carriage waiting for him, he little suspected that every yard he went was bringing him nearer to the injured wife he mourned as dead.

Marion Lindsey met him in the drawing-room. The furniture, all disarranged, told of something amiss, even if her pale tear-stained face had not warned him what to expect.

She came forward to shake hands with him simply and unaffectedly as one should do in the presence of the great healer of sorrows, the great leveller of us all.

And as she did so he thought, with a weary sigh, that never had she looked more beautiful, not with the beauty of the world, but the sweetness scattered by a sense of good deeds done.

And Marion, who had not seen him since the night of the ball, was shocked at the alteration time had wrought in him; and her heart, free from all vestige of the old love, yearned to give him comfort in place of the sorrow she must convey. For Lady Lindsey knew a good deal now—all or almost all there was to tell.

She knew where she had seen Maude before—the scene was vivid in her memory then. She knew that the husband must be confronted with his dying wife, and she guessed from Jack's careworn face and careworn air that he too suffered, and regretted, and that the blow must fall at once without the softening influence of warning and of delay.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Carstairs," she

said, gently, on a matter of life and death. I believe I am right in saying you have a wife?"

He bowed his head humbly as he answered in a broken voice,—

"I have."

"Her name was Maude Grafton?"

"It was. Lady Lindesay, how do you know this? Have you brought me here to add to my torture—to increase the remorse I feel every hour of the day?"

"No. Heaven forbid, Jack." Here she laid her hand on his arm. "I have news—terrible news for you, my poor fellow—your wife—"

"Is ill?" he cried.

"Worse than that?" she answered.

"Is she dead?" Then as Maillon shook her head, he cried, "Where is she? Take me to her!"

"You can see her at once—she is here. Listen, Jack! She has not many hours to live. Spare her all you can."

He bowed his head without speaking, but the agony on his face told its own tale, as with a heartdrawn sigh he followed her from the room.

They had not far to go. In the chamber above, poor Maude Carstairs lay dying—happier now, perhaps, to die than, save for that one brief space, she had ever been to live, surrounded by the friends of her misfortunes, the good doctor, the kindly priest, the generous woman, whose goodness soothed her last moments with their care. Dying forgetful and forgotten of the man she loved, whom at that last supreme moment she was to meet face to face once more ere her free spirit took its course to where her troubles would be at an end.

Humbly Jack followed his conductress into the room, and stood at the foot of the bed, too stricken to ask forgiveness then; and in that last dread moment, ere Maude's gentle spirit took its flight, a gleam of recollection seemed to return, or else perhaps it was but the matter nearest her broken heart which forced itself to words.

"Jack! husband! darling!" she cried.

"Have you at last come back? I've been so weary waiting, dear, but now I shall find rest." And so she died.

[THE END.]

## FACTIÆ.

HE (preparing to leave): "I assure you, Miss Smarte, the time has passed very pleasantly this evening." She (abstractedly): "Yes, it is pleasant to know that it is past."

EMPLOYER: "You say that your habits are all correct?" Applicant: "Yes, sir." Employer (after a moment's pause): "Do you drink?" Applicant (absent-mindedly): "Thanks; don't care if I do."

MISS ELDERLEIGH: "No, Mr. Sissy, there is not a day passes that I do not add to my store of knowledge." "One is never too old to learn." And he wonders why she is never at home when he calls now.

They had been having condensed milk all the long Australian voyage, and the little boy was heartily sick of it. "Mamma," he said at last, in a moment of confidence, "I do wish that condensed cow would die."

"Doctor, what is the meaning of the peculiar formation just back of baby's ear?" "Combiveness, perhaps." "Why, some one said it was love of domestic life." "Oh, well, it's all one and the same thing."

AFTER LONG SEPARATION.—Smith: "Do you remember Miss Ackwright, with whom we used to dance so often?" Jones (who has only just come back from Australia): "Perfectly. She was pretty, but fanciful as the mischief, light and foolish, and I often said to myself, I pity the man who marries her." Smith: "I married her three years ago."

BLACK: "How d'y'a do, Green? I'm almost ashamed of myself for not calling before. But I've put it off and put it off until it did seem I never would call." Green: "Don't mention it, my dear fellow. You are very kind, I'm sure."

"Ah! Doebill, old boy, where are you going to spend the summer?" "I can make no definite arrangements until I know where my tailor and other creditors are going to spend theirs. One goes to the seashore for rest, you know."

PHYSICIAN: "Here, take this; it's good for your liver." Fogg: "And what do I care if it is? Haven't my liver given me more trouble than all my other tormentors put together? No, sir; give me something that's good for me, no matter how bad it is for my liver."

FRIEND: "What on earth are you doing to that picture?" Great Artist: "I am rubbing a piece of raw meat over this rabbit in the foreground. Mrs. De Rhodde will be here this afternoon, and when she sees her pet dog smell of that rabbit she'll buy it."

OLDMAN (after half an hour's talk against bachelorhood): "Now there's you, for instance. Why the mischief don't you get married?" Youngman (promptly): "Blessed if I know. Ask the girl that I asked last night."

EXAGGERATED WIFE: "What do you mean by coming home at this time in the morning?" Convivial Husband: "I'm sorry, dear, but it's not my fault. The fellows had all gone, didn't have anyone to talk to, so I came home."

"See that house on the hill?" asked the tramp of his partner. "Yes." "They've got a dog up there most as big as a horse. I've got an idea." "What is it? To keep away from the house?" "Naw. Let's go up and steal the dog."

"Do you know that since I had inflammation of the brain my memory has suffered immensely. For instance, in three or four days I shan't remember what I have been doing to-day." "Is it possible? Apropos—could you lend me a hundred dollars for a week?"

"I was just stopping to see your modus operandi," explained the visitor in the saw-mill. "We ain't got any," apologized the sawyer. "I've been tryin' to git the boss to interduce some of the new fangled inventions, but he says the old-fashioned way is good enough for him."

ANXIOUS TO GET HER OFF.—He (planning an elopement): "And at twelve o'clock you steal quietly out of the house and meet me at the corner. I won't have a carriage, as we must be as economical as possible." She: "Oh, I've made papa promise to pay for the carriage. George!"

"HAVE you boys' bicycles?" asked Paterfamilias. "Yes, sir," replied the dealer. "Do you want a safety or the other kind?" "Hum! Let's see. Is a safety so named because it is safe?" "Yes, sir." "Perfectly safe?" "Absolutely, sir." "Then I feel very sure my boy will prefer the other kind."

LITTLE EBEL: "And Cousin Mary is married? I did not know that she knew any gentlemen." Little Ebel's Mamma: "She must have known one at least, or she wouldn't have got married." Little Ebel: "Did you know papa before you were married to him, mamma?" Little Ebel's Mamma (with a sigh): "I thought I did."

MISS MURRAY HILL: "You say he has actually proposed, and you are to be married right off. How did you manage to hurry him up so?" Miss Beach: "I told him I despised those girls who wait on, wanting to be taken to the seaside every year after they were married. As soon as I said that he said if I took that view of it his income was large enough to justify him in offering me his heart and hand. Of course I accepted. If he thinks we are not going to the seaside after we are married he is fooling himself."

MISS PRIME: "Philosophers disagree as to which period of life seems the longest to mankind. What is your opinion, doctor?" Doctor (meditatively): "Well, it varies. In women, for instance, the longest, generally, is between twenty-nine and thirty. I know in my wife's case ten years elapsed between her twenty-ninth and thirtieth birthday."

In a small theatre, in the English provinces, at the close of the third act the curtain did not drop the whole length, but remained suspended half way. Stretched on the stage lay a solitary dead man. As all endeavours to lower the curtain failed, the corpse at length got up and said, in sepulchral tones, "No rest even in the grave," and dragged the curtain to the floor.

ALAN had spent a long evening with Miss Edith. At last he rose to go. Her handshake was not cordial enough to quit him; in fact, it was very limp and exhausted; she was disappointed, for he had expected a very different parting, but in a vein of pleasantry he said, "Oh, shake hands with a man, Miss Edith!" "I should be pleased to, Mr. Brown," was her quiet rejoinder. Alan has not called since.

A BISHOP was travelling in a mining country, and encountered an old Irishman turning a windlass which hauled up ore out of a shaft. It was his work to do this all day long. His hat was off, and the sun poured down on his unprotected head. "Don't you know that sun will injure your brain if you expose it in that manner?" said the good man. The Irishman wiped the sweat off his forehead and looked at the clergyman. "Do ye think I'd be doin' this all day if I had any brains?" he said, and then gave the handle another turn.

"My dear," said a young and fashionable New York lady to her plain old-fashioned husband, "I hope you are not going to talk at dinner before all the company about how you went barefooted when a boy. Every time we have company you shake the people by talking about your bare feet when you were a boy." "My dear, I'll not mention my bare feet." He kept his promise. He did not say a word about his bare feet, but he talked long and eloquently about having been obliged to walk backward out of church on one occasion, owing to the dilapidated condition of his unmentionables consequent on his indigent condition.

A WORTHY man who was very sensitive and retiring, having lost his wife, privately requested that he might be remembered in the minister's morning prayer from the pulpit, but asked that his name might not be mentioned. On Sunday morning the good minister prayed most eloquently for "our aged brother upon whom the heavy hand of sore affliction hath so lately fallen." At this point an elderly man whom the minister had married so a very young wife during the week, rose with a bounce and stamped down the aisle, uttering, loud enough to be heard half over the chapel, "It may be an affliction, but I'm blessed if I want to be prayed for in that fashion!"

"Yes," said the young man, as he threw himself at the feet of the pretty Gitan girl; I love you and would go to the world's end for you." "You would not go to the end of the world for me, James. The world, or the earth as it is called, is round like a ball, slightly flattened at the poles. One of the first lessons in the elementary geography is devoted to the shape of the globe. You must have studied it when a boy." "Of course I did, but—" "And it is no longer a theory. Circumnavigators have established the fact." "I know; but what I meant was that I would do anything to please you. Ah, Minerva, if you knew the aching void—" "There's no such a thing as a void, James. Nature abhors a vacuum; but admitting that there could be such a thing, how could the void you speak of be a void if there was an ache in it?" "Well, at all events," exclaimed the youth, "I have got a pretty fair balance in the bank, and I want you to be my wife. There!" "Well, James, since you put it in that light, I—"



## SOCIETY.

EARLS' granddaughters are the lowest rank eligible for a Maid of Honour.

DENMARK ladies are great lovers of the bicycle, and clubs for riding the wheel are found in many of the larger towns.

The children of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught are among the prattiest of all the Queen's grandchildren, and especial favourites with her.

The very handsome diamond and ruby ring which the poor Duke of Clarence was so fond of and was always wearing is now very conspicuous on the hand of Princess May.

It is not the case that the wedding of Prince Ferdinand of Roumania and Princess Marie of Edinburgh is to take place at Windsor. They are to be married at Bucharest about the end of October, according to the present arrangements.

The young Duke of York speaks very openly to his friends about his approaching marriage with his cousin, and many orders have been given to the tradespeople, both by the bride and bridegroom, in view of the happy event.

The engagement of Prince Ferdinand of Hohenlohe, the heir to the Roumanian throne to the Princess Marie of Edinburgh, has given great pleasure to his august relatives at Bensassa, and especially to his aunt, the Countess of Flanders, who has always been on the most cordial terms with her brothers.

PRINCESS VICTORIA of Hawaii will visit the United States and the World's Fair in 1893, returning to Honolulu in time to celebrate her eighteenth birthday, October 16, when she will become eligible to assume the duties of her position as heir apparent to the throne of Hawaii.

These are some of the favourite games actually played by the Sovereigns. The Czar is much amused with tric-trac. William II. adores chess, fancying that it is a game of war that he is playing. The King of Italy has a notable preference for the game of draughts. The King of the Belgians likes a game of whist. The old Sovereign of Denmark is the first piquet player in Europe. The King of Roumania plays ecarte. The Emperor of Austria, *schach*—what a lugubrious word and game! The King of Norway and Sweden plays at *trante-et-une* like any other good citizen.

THE Czar of All the Russias has a gigantic appetite, or rather the appetite of a giant. He commences the day by breakfasting at seven o'clock with tea, ham, eggs, and cold roast beef; at eleven o'clock lunch, consisting of eggs beaten up in broth, mutton chops, cold game, chicken, fish, vegetables, sweets, all washed down by several cups of very strong coffee. The Czar is very fond of fish, and generally likes to eat the fish he himself has caught, and has it served at every meal. At two o'clock he will eat a plain rice pudding. It is needless to say his dinner is splendid and succulent, which does not prevent him taking tea with biscuits and cakes before going to rest.

To those of the fair sex who wish to preserve their complexion, a hint may be given not to expose the face to the artificial heat of fire or gas. The cold is favourable to brunettes, while heat favours blondes. The wind injures the skin very much, and to walk against the wind must always be avoided; and it is said kissing spoils the skin. There are many parents in Spain and Italy who do not allow their children to be kissed except by their nearest relatives, because the downy appearance of the skin, like the peach, is spoiled thereby. The juice of lemons and strawberries, used occasionally, has a very beneficial effect on the face. On the contrary, alcoholic essences, often put in water to wash with, dry and harden the skin, and prevent the necessary perspiration taking place.

## STATISTICS.

THE British Mint coins twenty-five tons of pennies every year.

THERE is but one sudden death among women to every ten among men.

THERE are said to be 100,000 lilacs in full bloom in a field in Barroada.

NATURALISTS say that a single swallow will devour six thousand flies in a day.

DUCKS fly at an average rate of ninety miles per hour. With a fair wind it is believed that they can make 150 miles in the same time.

THERE is no missionary in Afghanistan with her 6,000,000 people. Roman Catholic missionaries are the only ones to succeed in getting a hold on Annam, with her 5,000,000. India has one missionary to 275,000 people; Persia one to 800,000; Tibet one to 2,000,000.

## GEMS.

AGREEABLE advice is seldom useful advice.

UNLESS we flattered ourselves, the flattery of others would do us no harm.

MEN of courage, men of sense, and men of letters are frequent; but a true gentleman is what is seldom seen.

FINE natures are like fine poems; a glance at the first two lines suffices for a guess into the beauty that waits you if you read on.

TIME is the most subtle and yet the most insatiable of depredators; appearing to take nothing, it takes all. Nor can it be satisfied until it has stolen the world from us and us from the world. It constantly flies, and yet overcomes all things by flight; and, although it is present ally it will be the future conqueror of death.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A GOOD "PICK-UP."—Take a glass of home-made lemonade and drop into it a raw egg. Beat all quickly with a little shaker, and drink slowly. The effect of this cooling and nutritious egg-lemonade will be found delightful and permanent when one is tired and fagged.

RIBBON WAFERS.—To one pound of fine sugar add a quarter of a pound of flour and the peel of two lemons. Beat three eggs well, then add the other ingredients to them. Grease some tin sheets or shallow pans with melted butter, and roll out the past very thin. When the wafers are half done roll them round your fingers and return them to the oven to get crisp.

CANARY PUDDING.—Three eggs, the weight of the eggs in butter, the same in sugar, the weight of two eggs in flour, the rind of one small lemon. Melt the butter, and add to it the sugar and lemon rind, then gradually stir in the flour; whisk the eggs, add them to the mixture; beat all the ingredients thoroughly together; pour into a buttered basin, and boil for two hours. Serve with sweet sauce.

PICKLED WALNUTS.—Gather for pickling when the head of a pin will easily go in, lay them in salt and water for ten days, changing the brine twice, then take them out and lay them on a sieve, not touching each other. Turn them over that they may be all black alike. Boil one quart of vinegar to 25 walnuts, with half ounce whole black pepper, half ounce ginger, quarter ounce mace, four bay leaves, one tablespoonful mustard seed, boil and pour boiling over the walnuts, see that they are quite covered. Cover the jar with a cloth, and when cold cork tightly. In six weeks they are ready. If not quite covered with vinegar put more in cold.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

A PLAN has been invented for cutting ice with a wire heated by electricity.

CASES in the medical books show that somnambulists have walked as far as fifteen miles in their sleep.

THE locomotive engine was known, it is said, in China at the beginning of the 18th century.

JET is a variety of coal with a very fine grain susceptible of a high polish. The finest jet comes from the mines at Whitby.

HACKNEY coaches were forbidden during the reign of Charles II. on the ground that they destroyed the king's highway.

THE first steam vessel to cross the Atlantic Ocean was the Savannah, which crossed from Savannah, Ga., to Liverpool in 1819.

THE wild potato vine sometimes has a root that attains the size and occasionally the form of a boy's body, and weighs thirty-five pounds.

If geologists be correct, New Zealand is a fragment of a continent which sank beneath the waters as the new world rose. It is a relic of a bygone age.

"COOL as a cucumber" is correct scientifically. Investigators claim that that vegetable usually has a temperature one degree lower than that of the surrounding atmosphere.

ORANGE juice is a good shoe-blackener. Take a slice or quarter of orange and rub it on the shoes. Then when dry, brush with a soft brush till the shoe shines like a looking-glass.

THE aurora borealis in winter and spring is an infallible precursor of cold weather. Whether it is caused by advancing cold waves, or whether the electric disturbances of which it is the sign cause the cold wave seems to be undetermined, but there is some connection between the two, the effect having been too often noticed to admit of doubt.

A SCIENTIST states that in the course of about six million years from now the forces at work on the earth will have completely revealed its surface, so that there will no longer be hills or valleys, continents, or distinctive oceans. All the land will have been washed down into the sea, which will then cover all with a watery mantle, and render impossible any life except that which can exist without dry land.

If two pieces of sugar be smartly rubbed together in the dark a pale blue light will be noticed as a result. The following is of some practical value. If one or two pieces of phosphorus of the size of peas be inclosed in a small bottle half full of olive oil and kept for some little time the space in the bottle will become filled with a phosphorescent vapour. The phosphorescence will fade, but may be renewed by simply uncorking the bottle.

CARDINAL WOLSEY was, in common with many Churchmen of olden time, an ancient lover of good dinners. Henry VIII. was fond of accepting the hospitality of the ecclesiastical dignitary, who maintained his establishment with semi-royal state. The cook was a personage of such importance that his daily dress was of silk and satin, with a heavy gold chain as his insignia of office. The feasts of those days were conducted on the most generous scale, and the stranger was never turned away from the door.

THE term "cut off with a shilling" probably arose in the following manner:—The Romans were wont to set aside testaments as being *ineffectual*, that is, deficient in natural duty, if they disinherited or totally passed by any of the children of the testator. But if the child had any legacy, however small, it was a proof that the testator had not lost his reason or his memory, which, otherwise the law presumed. Hence arose the term "cutting off with a shilling," based on the groundless error of the necessity of leaving the heir with a shilling, or some express legacy, in order to disinherit him effectually.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**CARRY.**—There is no difference.

**SWEET WILLIAM.**—Sunderland is the county of Durham.

**TABITHA.**—Mrs. Maybrick was convicted on August 7th, 1889.

**AGATHA.**—A domestic servant can give a month's notice at any time.

**FACTORY GIRL.**—Good Friday is a closing day under the Factory Act.

**DECIMA.**—Private schools are not subject to Government inspection.

**CONSTANT READER.**—Sorry we can't; the information given last week was the fullest we possess.

**HOME-BIRD.**—Cradley, Worcestershire, is a townshipp with a population of about 5,300.

**SCAMP.**—Process is a patent one, we understand; in any case, the materials are not known to us.

**T. F.**—There is no difference in the recoil when firing a Martini-Henry at 100 yards and 1,000 yards.

**FAITH.**—A widow marrying again, would retain full power over any property already in her possession.

**MAMIE.**—No peer can take his seat in the House of Lords before the age of twenty-one.

**LORELIE.**—In the average head of human hair there are about 150,000 hairs.

**JUANITY.**—To make themselves plump, Turkish women eat rose-leaves fried with butter.

**DICK.**—The Grimman War was declared in March, 1834, a Coalition Ministry, with Lord Aberdeen at its head, being in power.

**L. F. T.**—The word Philately is derived from the Greek words *philos*, loving, and *ateleia*, freedom from tax.

**W. P.**—If a debt has not been acknowledged within six years the Statute of Limitations may be pleaded.

**FIZ.**—Mrs. Disraeli, the wife of the late Lord Beaconsfield, received a peerage before her husband's peerage was conferred upon him.

**NANCY LEE.**—Sloops have only one mast. A sloop-of-war is a vessel rigged either as a ship, a brig, or a schooner, and carrying eighteen to thirty-two guns.

**TAUBLED MOTHER.**—The father of an illegitimate child cannot claim its custody, which legally belongs to the mother only.

**FREQUENT ENQUIRER.**—The hours for issuing stamps from Somerset House are from 10 to 4; on Saturdays from 10 to 2.

**HEAD OF THE FAMILY.**—A tenancy is not "quarterly" unless there was an agreement that a quarter's notice should be given.

**B. A. R.**—"But when he came so pale and wan," the "Execution of Montrose," will be found in Aytoun's "Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers."

**A. A.**—Solicitors are admitted to practice as advocates in police courts and county courts, but not at quarter sessions or assizes.

**A NORTH COUNTRY GIRL.**—No matter where you are born, if your parents are Scotch you are Scotch too; that is the rule of law.

**MUFF.**—General Lord Wolseley received a peerage as a reward for military services. Sir Evelyn Wood has not yet received that distinction.

**JUDY.**—The family name of the English Royal Family is Guelp, but the late Prince Consort was a member of the house of Coburg.

**JUMBO.**—The punishment for a deserter is usually a term of imprisonment, within certain limits, according to the circumstances of the case.

**PHILIPPA.**—If you write to the Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W., you will get all particulars as to assisted emigration to Canada.

**CHATTER-BOX.**—The magpie, like the starling, can be taught to imitate human sounds by constantly repeating to it the words it is to learn; patience is necessary.

**L. C. B.**—Leicester is a borough; not a city. The circumstance that a place gives a title to a Suffragan Bishop does not necessarily constitute it a city.

**JERRY.**—A person who becomes "bail" for another has to satisfy the justices that if called upon he could pay the amount of the "bail."

**A TWENTY-FOUR YEARS READER.**—A man having died intestate, the wife and child or children alone share the property. The deceased's brothers and sisters have no claim.

**INQUIRITIVE.**—We don't know how much handmasters are paid in Volunteer regiments, but we understand their pay is according to their ability and standing in the profession.

**GARRIE.**—The name Cockburn is pronounced Cokburn; the name Calman is Calman in the old Scotch way, pronounced as spelt now-a-days; just as Menzies, formerly Mingie, is now Menzies.

**ELKIE.**—There is much embroidery in the market which is called Japanese, but which was never in that country. Very fine needlework comes from Persia, China and many other countries, but as Japanese goods have been specially popular for some years much of the work goes by that name.

**ONE IN TROUBLE.**—If you can show that you have lost an engagement through false statements made by your late employer, you would have a legal claim to damages for slander.

**G. L.**—Weston walked several matches in Agricultural Hall, Islington, London, in 1876, 77, 78, 79, and 84; his first match began on 6th March, 1876, for six days; another in same year began on 18th December.

**N. W.**—A man cannot in England marry his deceased brother's widow. The form of marriage in such a case does not constitute a marriage, and if there are children from such a connection they are illegitimate.

**AN IGNORANT GIRL.**—"R. S. V. P." written at the bottom of an invitation means: "Reply, if you please." They are the initial letters of the French words: *Répondez, s'il vous plaît.*

**CORALIE.**—The shell which somewhat resembles pink coral is the conch shell brought from Panama and the West Indies. The part which is used for making it into jewellery is the inner lining of the shell.

**FUSCHIE.**—There used to be a superstitious value placed upon a baby's nail, and many quaint virtues were attributed to it. We believe sailors still value them, but their money's worth has fallen to almost nothing.

**GRANNIE.**—The word worsted, as applied to goods, comes from Worstead, in Norfolk County, England, where worsted goods were first made. They differ from woollen goods in being woven from a stronger and harder spun yarn.

## THE WATCHER.

She sits by the cottage window,  
Watching the glooming sea,  
The while she soothes with droning song  
The restless babe on her knee;  
Watching and waiting and longing  
For the light of the fishing-boat  
That sailed afar o'er the outer bar  
When the sea in the sunlight laughed.

And now, when the storm is rising,  
As night o'er the great world stinks,  
There is sad unrest in her weary breast—  
"Ah! will he come home?" she thinks.  
For the winds and the waves are folkie,  
And uncertain is Fate's decree;  
And lonely lives have the weary wives  
Of those who sail the sea.

The kettle is merrily singing;  
The chamber is cheery and gay;  
In the cosy rays of the driftwood blaze  
Are the cat and her kittens at play;  
And baby at last is sleeping.  
With red little cheeks dimpled tight;  
But the sad eyes still from the widow's sill  
Are strained through the stormy night.

Is it the gleam of a lantern,  
Or but a cloud-chased star,  
That is suddenly bowed, now seen, then lost,  
Through the sweeping shadows afar?  
No; it swings and sprays on the waters  
As only a ship's light can;  
And the fisher's wife hath found new life  
In the coming of her good-man.

In his little cradle so softly  
Is baby now laid away;  
The light leaps higher from the driftwood fire,  
The kittens more merrily play;  
The blush on the cheek so comely  
Is bright as it ever can be;  
Sweet are the lives of the cheery wives  
Of those who sail the sea.

**ARCHIE.**—Wild glasses are "sighted" up to the purposes they are to be used for; some are good only up to 1,000 yards, some are accurate up to 30 or 40 miles, both may be good, but the latter must be of greatest value, and need not cost more than 35s. to 40s.

**TINY.**—High heels are ruinous to the feet and legs; they produce corns, spoil the walk, and weaken the knees! A well-shaped leg is almost impossible after wearing high heels for several years, and a graceful walk is equally impossible.

**IGNORANT.**—There is no such person as the "public hangman"; nor does the Government pay any person employed as an executioner. Each sheriff employs such person as occasion requires, and pays whatever fee is given to him.

**DOLLY.**—The sardine would keep longer in vinegar than oil, but, as a matter of fact, they may be said to begin to decay the moment their hermetically sealed cases are opened, and neither oil nor anything else will keep them sweet for any time after that.

**HARRY.**—Your wife is at liberty to carry on a business with her own money and in her own name, independently of any agreement you may have entered into. But she must be able to show it is really her business, and not hers in name only.

**SOLDIER.**—Every Frenchman not unfit for service is bound to serve in the active army or reserves from his 20th to his 45th year; he may escape with only one year's service with the colours if he learns his duties in that time: Germans are bound to military service from 17th to 39th year—three years with colours, four in reserve, and remainder in militia; in Russia military service is compulsory on all from 18th year; in the European army the rule is five years with colours, thirteen in the reserve, and remainder in militia.

**WORRIED READER.**—According to your statement there has been no infraction of the terms of the agreement. You have the house and the good garden covenanted for; that you have not exclusive use of something else not mentioned in the contract is nothing to the point.

**ARGUMENT.**—A comparison of annual expenditure during ten years in the United Kingdom gives the following results:—Amount spent on linen goods yearly, £6,000,000; on cottons, £14,000,000; on household coal, £15,800,000; tea, coffee, &c., £30,000,000; sugar, £35,000,000; bread, £70,000,000; drink, £136,000,000.

**FAISOO.**—There is no standard value for old clocks, they are curiosities merely, and the price obtainable for them at any time depends upon the character of the purchaser who happens to be thrown in the way of the seller; advertise the article, giving date of manufacture if possible; you will then have visitors and offers, and need not take the first offer you get.

**VENTURE.**—We cannot give you a "thorough description" of a box-and-a-half traveller, because none exist; in some localities he is a man who has travelled three miles from the town in which he resides, and is then entitled to a moderate refreshment; we suppose he could call for a gill of spirits or a quart of ale; he would hardly be entitled to a second supply, but there would be difficulty in preventing him from getting it.

**B. T.**—The appearance of dark films before the eye, sometimes looking like cobwebs, or flakes of soot, or bunches of fur-downs, are quite common, many eyes being subject to them, and they may occur for a long time without getting worse, and unaccompanied by positive disease; but when they appear as a stationary film, which obscures the vision, an oculist should be consulted without delay.

**T. W.**—The cost of the Forth bridge was estimated at £1,600,000. The bridge is constructed with two brackets or cantilevers, and on central girders built on three main piers. The clear headway under the centre of the bridge at high water is 152 feet. The total length of the viaduct is about one mile and a half. Special provision is made against the action of the wind. About 3,500 workmen were employed.

**LOOT.**—When recruits are wanted for these Colonial forces the authorities out there usually write home to the Chief Consulate of an important centre in Scotland or England, and invite men to volunteer for the place; there are no agents here, but you can write to the Superintendent of Police, Hong Kong, China, stating your qualification, and asking to be put on the list of candidates; that may serve your purpose.

**TAUBLED.**—Probably the best way to deal with a plague of rats is to trap as many of them as possible, then carefully close with cement all the holes they have made; one of the most powerful lures or bait that can be used to attract them into a trap is oil of almond; touch some food lightly with a brush (not the hand) dipped in that, and the rodent will strain every nerve to reach it.

**ANXIOUS.**—If you were able to command an introduction to one or more steamship owners you might possibly find among them one who would accept you as an assistant steward, whose principal duty is to wait at table, sweep up, and keep things orderly; or a purser-ship, to issue and collect tickets, &c.; but we must tell you frankly that owners have so many demands on them for these posts that it is a most difficult matter to obtain one.

**ANXIOUS TO LEARN.**—You would make far more progress by studying French and German under an instructor, than you would by trying to learn them from text-books only. The utmost that you can do by yourself is to learn the grammar of the language. With a good instructor you can learn the pronunciation also, and can learn the grammar more easily and methodically. A passable knowledge of French can be obtained in eight or nine months of study under a good instructor, if you devote to him four hours a week. German would require more study.

**UNFORTUNATE.**—There is no demand whatever for mechanics in Queensland, many carpenters, plumbers, and general labourers have been out of work, and no one, with the possible exception of a few ploughmen, should go there at present on the chance of finding employment. Western Australia still offers free and reduced passages to certain classes of emigrants; and there is a demand for a limited number of farm labourers, men in the building trades, miners, and labourers on railways and public works. In Tasmania the silver mines at Zeehan are giving employment to considerable numbers of miners and others. In various districts of New Zealand there is a demand for farm and station hands.

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